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# THE ASSAULT ON THE SARDAR SAROVAR DAM

25th Dec. 1990 - 28th Jan. 1991

Documents, newsclippings, media statements

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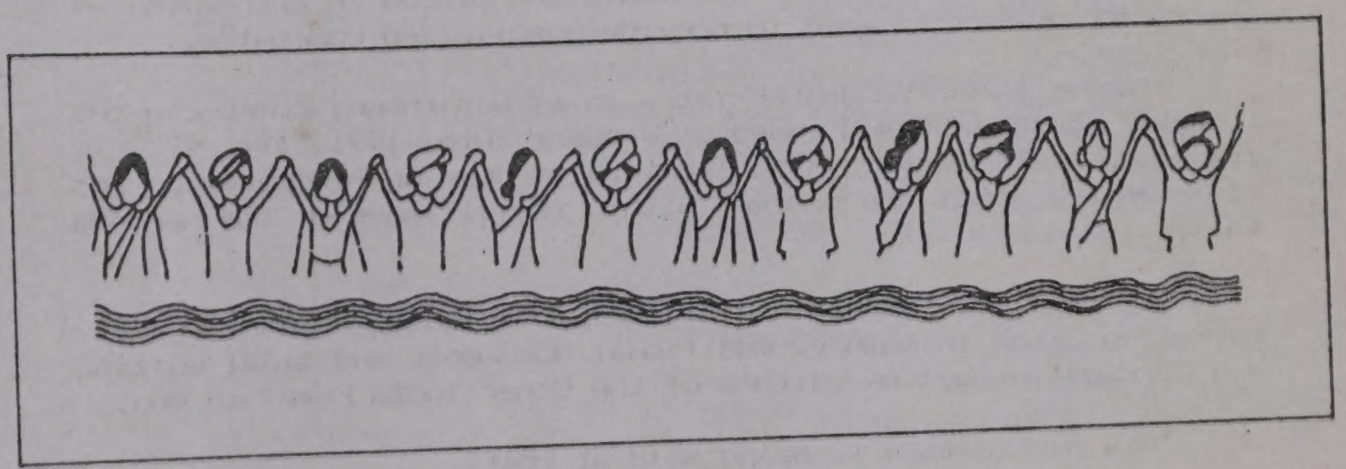

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*Note from the Publisher*

The following pages provide, through a selection of press reports, original documents and media statements, glimpses of the Long March that tribals, peasants and activists from the Narmada Valley and other parts of the country undertook to stop the Sardar Sarovar Dam project. As the documents are placed in chronological order, no attempt is made to provide unsolicited commentary.

The Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra as it was known, commenced on December 25th, 1990 and ended on January 28th, 1991. Its termination inaugurated a declaration of open non-cooperation and resistance against the project within the villages of the Narmada Valley.

The original compilation of these documents was carried out by Raajen Singh in Bombay. Additional documents and final editing was carried out by the editors of the Other India Press in Goa.

This publication is being sold at cost.

*The leaders of the Narmada Bachao Andolan met the Prime Minister on May 17, 1990, and thereafter wrote the following letter to the him on May 19, 1990.*

Shri V.P. Singh
Prime Minister of India
New Delhi

May 19, 1990

Dear V.P. Singhji,

On behalf of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, we would like to sincerely thank you for giving the tribals and peasants of the Narmada Valley a patient hearing on 17 May, 1990. The people of the Valley have gone back with the feeling that the voice of villagers is now being heard in India with due concern and respect.

We are also thankful to you for agreeing to hold a dialogue, between the representatives of the Andolan and the Government, on the issues raised by the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Pursuant to this assurance of yours, a meeting to decide on the terms of reference and procedures for such a dialogue has already been held on 18 May, 1990. It was attended by seven of us representing the Andolan, and the Secretaries of the Ministries of Water Resources, Environment and Forests, and Welfare, as well the Secretary of the Narmada Control Authority.

At the meeting we have identified the various issues which would need to be taken up as part of the process of comprehensively reviewing the Sardar Sarovar Project. These issues have been noted by the Secretaries present at the meeting, and are listed in an enclosed note, for your reference.

We have also laid out a broad framework for such a review, which should include discussions on various fundamental developmental values and principles, raised at our meeting with you, and accepted by you as being serious.

There seemed to have been a basic agreement, at the meeting, among the officials and non-official participants on the importance and relevance of the issues identified. However, your view on the matter is to be sought by the officials before arriving at a decision.

We have also presented our view of the <u>modus operandi</u> of such a review. The main points are as follows:

* the process should be formal and official, with a commitment from both sides to honour the recommendations.

* the review team should be composed of (a) senior representatives of the Ministries of Water Resources, Social Welfare, Environment and Forests, and Finance, as well as the Planning Commission; (b) representatives of the Narmada Bachao Andolan; and (c) independent experts, acceptable to the Government and the Andolan, in the fields related to the issues under appraisal.

* in order to ensure that the process is really objective and impartial, as also to ensure that the review does not become redundant due to the large expenses incurred on the project, giving the dam an appearance of irreversibility, it would be necessary that the work on and related to the Project is stopped till the review is completed.

* the review process should be completed within two to three months.

* the government should provide all the documents and data relevant for the review, so as to allow all of the team's members to get fully informed about the Project. A first list of the documents and data needed by us is enclosed.

The Secretaries assured us that they would seek your views on the matter and convey these to us by the end of this month. Your decision on our requests may please be communicated simultaneously to all the representatives of the Andolan, to save time. Their addresses are enclosed.

We do hope that you would look into the specific issues related to the SSP, as well as the fundamental questions, regarding our developmental policies, raised by the Narmada Bachao Andolan. As the Secretaries themselves stated, looking at the SSP within a broad framework would certainly prove to be a major contribution towards re-orienting our developmental model, to make it socially just and ecologically sustainable.

Thanking you, with regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Medha Patkar)
on behalf of Narmada Bachao Andolan

Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti
38 Gandhi Marg
Badwani, Khargone
Madhya Pradesh - 451539

Narmada Bachao Andolan - Delhi
C17/A Munirka
New Delhi - 110067

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Dhule, Maharashtra.
Announcement of Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra (Long March)

Dear Friends,

The struggle in the Narmada Valley has reached a critical phase. The oppression by the Madhya Pradesh government is increasing every day with arrests, caning and mounted police amidst public gatherings. All efforts are made to repress the struggle by bribing a handful of villagers and luring them with small pieces of land. On the other hand there are a number of issues implying serious inter-state conflicts which have in a way confirmed our objections to the project. The issues range from the allocation of Narmada waters to escalated cost of the dam. And yet the dam construction goes on, utterly false and manipulated statistics are being presented to the World Bank.

Inspite of all these happenings, the movement of the people is gaining strength and momentum with 'non-co-operation' and various other programmes of protest. The government is, no doubt, feeling threatened by the opposition as is obvious from its resort to increasingly repressive measures.

It is in this context that the valley feels a need for the strongest ever agitation in the near future.

The next move will be taken with the commitment to extract a favourable response from the government to the issues raised. Thousands of people in the Valley - the tribals from the hilly ranges of the Vindhyas and Satpudas and farmers and labourers from the prime agricultural land of West Nimad are all ready to come out of their houses, hamlets and villages. They will themselves lead the intense agitation with strong determination to stop the government from carrying out its campaign of falsehood, its repression of the non-violent movement as also the disastrous work of Sardar Sarovar dam site.

They will walk down hundreds of kilometres in a long march announced as Jan-Vikas Sangharsh Yatra (Long March for People Oriented Development).

This unprecedented long march will bring to light the issues of the human rights of every village, not only in Narmada but in every valley of the country. Throwing a challenge to the faulty model of development it will establish people's right to the land and forest in the villages and raise the issue of the survival of the poorest in the cities. The struggle against Sardar Sarovar will thus become a prime force to the broader movement for people- oriented development.

The long march will obviously have the immediate aim of halting the further construction of the destructive project of Sardar Sarovar. Thousands of people determined to achieve the ultimate goal will march straight to the dam site.

The march will commence on December 25, 1990 from Badwani, Madhya Pradesh, after the participants take an oath at the memorial of Mahatma Gandhi on the banks of Narmada. They will move from village to village in the districts of Khargone, Dhar and Jabva.

Thousands will join them not only from the affected villages but from people's organisations all over the country.

You are requested to raise the issue of human rights, environment sustainability and people oriented development by taking appropriate actions wherever you are with the concern and commitment that you have always shown to the cause. Do remember this is the strongest every battle in the Narmada Valley to safeguard their right to life to which we are sure you will extend your support and solidarity in every possible way.

Medha Patkar

## News on Narmada

* Since March 6, 1990, the Narmada Bachao Andolan has entered a more vigorous phase, not of course compromising on the principle of non-violence. This vigour has been fuelled by the growing articulation and strength of the people of the valley on the one hand, and the government sponsored repression on the other.

There have been repeated incidents of unprovoked police beatings, harrassment and detention. And now, recently -

* *Sankalp Diwas (DAY OF RESOLVE), BADWANI, 26th Sept. 1990-*

Planned to be a huge gathering reiterating the resolve to fight "destructive development" as celebration especially of the Harsud Sankalp Mela of Sept.28th last year, the police and the administration made all efforts to thwart it. They broke the memorial monument at Kasravad, cordoned off the meeting place with barbed wires, raided the houses of the local village leaders, night after night and arrested 40 persons. They also arrested guests arriving from outside.

Inspite of this, the villagers hid, rowed across the river and gathered in huge numbers to defy the police to participate in the programme. The public meeting became a rally which ended at the police station, where the people sat in protest against the police atrocities.

* *SANKALP PARISHAD-DHULIA 28th Sept., 1990-*

A seminar was held at Dhule, in which tribals and tribal organizations from Shirpur, Nandurbar, Molgi, Marathwada, Bombay, Pune, Nasik took part. They collectively conceptualized their common understanding on the question of "tribals, environment and development" especially in the context of the Narmada Valley Projects.

* *GUJARAT : SAMVAD YATRA (THE JOURNEY OF DIALOGUE) -*

From 2nd to 10th October, members of the Jan Vikas Andolan travelled through Gujarat. Around 22 meetings were held at various places with tribals, slum-dwellers and middle-class citizens. The local, area-specific problems of the rampant industrialization and present development patterns were discussed. Potential victims of the various proposed mega-projects resolved to oppose these projects and fight them tooth and nail.

Several examples of soil and water conservation works and appropriate agriculture interventions initiated by the local NGOs in Gujarat in the drought prone areas of Kutch and Saurashtra were visited and studied in detail.

## NEWS SNIPPETS

* The 4 chief ministers of the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh met on 18th Sept. 1990. People's representatives were meant to have been called to this meeting, but with the exception of one person, the other persons were "put up" candidates by the government. The Commissioner, Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Govt. of India, protested strongly against the Narmada project. The Chief Ministers, however, had already made up their minds and dismissed the suggestion of reviewing the project.

* Inspite of the fact that all important environmental studies on this project are still pending, no complete plan exists for development and resettlement, let alone even any passable identification of land for the oustees. The World Bank has chosen to ignore these ground realities and has further relesased funds to the project on July 1, 1991.

* The Ministry of Environment, Governemt of India, has withdrawn its clearance for further construction of the project, on grounds of incomplete environment related studies.

## LONG MARCH

* The next large and very crucial mass action of the Narmada Bachao Andolan is a proposed long march from Rajghat in Badwani, Madhya Pradseh to the dam site in Gujarat, begining Dec 25, 1990. Thousands of tribals and peasants from M.P., Maharashtra and Gujarat shall take part in this march, alongwith many friends and sympathisers.

*November 13, 1990*

# Narmada march from Dec 25

Independent, 2 Nov. 90

**Raju Kanc**

IN A LAST ditch attempt to stop the construction of the controversial Sardar Sarovar Project, over 75,000 oustees from Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat, have decided to march from Badwani in Madhya Pradesh's Khargone district to the dam site, even as the Madhya Pradesh government has let loose a reign of terror in the valley to crush the movement.

The over 400 km long march, called "Jan Vikas Sangarsh Yatra" (a march for the struggle of people oriented development), would begin from December 25, activists of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the organisation spearheading the movement said.

The march would start from Rajghat near Badwani, after a vow of peaceful struggle at a memorial to Mahatma Gandhi there, and would pass through various villages in the Khargone and Dhar districts that will be affected by the SSP.

The march would also cover the predominantly tribal areas of Alirajpur and Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh and Akrani and Akkalkuwa in Maharashtra.

Many mass-based organisations from all over the country have decided to participate in the march and several prominent citizens would also extend their support.

The march would be led by noted social worker and Magasaysay award winner Baba Amte and Medha Patkar, who has been at the forefront of the struggle against the project. The activists, however, refused to give the names of the organisations supporting the march, saying that these would be released to the press at a later date.

The activists said that people would join the march as it passes through their villages, and would only stop only after halting the construction of the dam.

They said the aim of the march is not only to stop the project, but also to highlight the developmental problems of the masses.

It would not only challenge the existing developmental model, with its insistence on mega-projects, but would instead strive to establish a paradigm of development based on maintaining ecological balance and social justice.

The activists also claimed that the Madhya Pradesh government has let loose a reign of terror in the Narmada Valley to crush the movement. Preventive arrests, lathi charges, beatings and harassament of women activists has become quite common.

Even Amte, who last year shifted from his ashram at Anandwan in Mahashtra to Chhoti Kasarvad on the banks of the Narmada to lead the agitation, has been "living under the shadow of gun toting police officials and abusive, threatening administrative machinery," the activists said.

Giving specific instances, the activists said some villages like Kasarvad, Chhota Badada, Bagud, Chikalda and Kundia, which have played an important role in the anti-SSP agitation, are being earmarked for special treatment.

Late night raids, indiscriminate arrests without any charges being proferred, as well as torture inside lockups have become the order of the day in these villages.

Villagers in Badwani were made to sign blank papers and these were later used to charge some leading activists, the activists alleged.

Boatmen from Chhota Badada, who had helped the people reach Kasarvad village on September 26, which the Andolan observed as 'Sankalp Din' (resolution day), have been harrassed since, and their boats seized by the police.

In a statement from Chhoti Kasarvad village, Amte has however reiterated the people's resolve to keep on fighting till suspension of all work on the dam and a holistic reappraisal of the entire project.

In his statement, Amte has said, "From my sick bed I proclaim that people of the Narmada Valley will defy death itself in the pursuit of their aim. I am feeling the pulse of the people, their determination. The struggle is intense but non violent."

Appealing to the Madhya Pradesh government to give up its repression, Amte said, "When a nation is being robbed of its hope, it becomes imperative for the government to understand the people, the real issues. The people of the Narmada Valley have been continuing their struggle since the last five years. Those who listen to the dictates of their conscience should stand by the valient people in Narmada Valley to protect human rights — the right to live a safe, full and free life, without the shadow of fear."

# March against Narmada dam

**By A Staff Reporter**

BOMBAY, Nov. 12.

*"NARMADA ghati kare sawal, jeene ka haq ya maut ka jal,"* will be the slogan for the long march against the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) in the Narmada valley, which will begin on December 25 at Rajghat in Madhya Pradesh.

The march which will be a sort of "do or die" agitation by the tribals in the valley, will end at the dam site of the Sardar Sarovar Project, Ms Medha Patkar, who is leading the agitation against the dam, told reporters today.

The march will go along the banks of Narmada and pass through villages in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. Several villagers will join on the way, she said. There will be a satyagraha at the dam site at Nawagam in Bharuch district of Gujarat.

She said the government and the project authorities were ignoring the guidelines prescribed by the environment ministry and the clearances granted to them had been deemed to have lapsed, as several conditions were not met with.

No compensatory afforestation plans, catchment area treatment plans, command area development or soil surveys had been completed and the government was trying to go ahead with the project by using force, she said.

The irreversibility of the project was the key argument being held out by the government, she added. In Maharashtra the tribals had declared their resolve not to move from their villages and had refused the forest land allotted to them at Taloda, in Dhule district. Despite this, clear felling of the Taloda forest was going on and it was only because the required security could not be provided that it was kept in abeyance for a while, she said.

Even tehsil level officers were threatening people, she said. In Maharashtra, where there is a tradition of adivasi struggles the use of force on tribals was highly condemnable, she said.

In Madhya Pradesh, preventive arrests and false charges on activists were the order of the day and people going for political meetings addressed by the chief minister were often stopped and asked to get down from buses, she said.

Mr Kersy Sabavala, from Gujarat, who took part in a samvad yatra in the state, said the government machinery through advertisements, political meetings and the media had created a feeling that once the SSP was completed, all the problems in Gujarat would be solved. The rehabilitation policy was unsatisfactory and people often had to live in transit camps for months before they were provided proper housing.

The canal-affected people were not even taken into account and they were over 60,000 of them, he said. In the yatra, where people were split into groups, one for north Gujarat and the other for the south, it was discovered that the two areas had separate problems that one project could not solve.

In the north, for instance, people who lost their land for the various projects there were fighting for their rights and the mention of a colossal one like the SSP angered them. In some drought-prone areas where the SSP water would not reach, the people were not taking a stand against the project because it did not affect them, he said.

On the other hand, various groups were successfully using methods in watersheds management on a small scale and these people said that if funds were provided, extensive work could be done. The government intended to build the dam and the powerhouse from foreign loans as it would be later impossible for them to generate funds on a yearly basis.

Mr Gajanan Khatu of the Jan Vikas Andolan in Bombay, said various progressive groups in the state were now concerned about the agitation against the Narmada projects and were raising the issue of development in their meetings which was not the case earlier.

Mr Bittu Sahgal of the Narmada Bachao Andolan said the agitation should create a climate where people can speak about their opposition to the SSP openly. He said the jungles in the Narmada valley were destroyed and this would adversely affect the project.

Times of India
Nov. 13, '90

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

November 27, 1990

Dear Shri Chandrashekhar,

You will be aware of the controversy regarding the Narmada River Valley Project, and about the struggle being waged by tribals and peasants of the Valley against the human displacement and ecological destruction threatened by this Project. You may also recall that 1500 people from the Valley had demonstrated in front of the residence of your predecessor, Shri V. P. Singh, for 4 days in May this year, to press home their demands. Shri Singh had then promised a serious and wideranging discussion between high-level government officials and representatives of the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Our letters to Shri Singh detailing our position on this are annexed.

Unfortunately the discussion never materialised, as there was no further initiative or response from the government. For the people in the Valley, this was the final signal that the government was not serious in resolving the Narmada controversy through dialogue, for many similar attempts at starting such a dialogue had met with a cold response from officials of both the central and state governments. Simultaneously, the Madhya Pradesh Government started taking a more and more repressive stance towards the movement, ordering lathi-charges on peaceful demonstrations, arrest of activists and villagers on flimsy charges, and constant harassment of villagers in the Valley. In such a situation, there was no alternative for the people but to resort to a path of direct struggle and confrontation, and to strengthen their resolve not to move out of their lands, even if the dam reservoir threatened to drown them.

Your own statements, in your address to the nation on November 17th, asserted the right of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to a life of dignity. You also stated that India's scarce resources need to be used carefully to provide minimum needs to all and not luxuries to a few. These statements have given some hope that the people of the Narmada Valley may yet get a fair hearing.

It is in this context that we are writing this open letter. We are acutely conscious of the fact that yours is a new government, but most of the people in your government were also in the previous one, and did not respond to our demands for a comprehensive reassessment of the Narmada Project with the full participation of the people of the Valley in any positive way. Besides, the people in the Valley are fast losing faith in the government (of whichever party), disappointed as they are with its record of broken promises, opportunistic politicking, and complete disregard for non-violent people's movements. We now feel that the only course open to us is to take to direct action, unless there is fresh thinking and an immediate positive response from your government.

Hence we are announcing a Sangharsh Yatra, beginning December 25, 1990. The yatra will proceed from Badwani, Madhya Pradesh, to the Sardar Sarovar Project dam site in Gujarat, where thousands of people will offer indefinite satyagraha. Apart from tribals and peasants of Narmada Valley itself, thousands of others, representatives of mass movements, social action and environmental groups, academics and scientists, lawyers and students, trade union workers, and other individuals will take part in this action. Tribals from all over the country are determined to join this struggle, considering it to be symbolic of the issue of their survival.

This yatra marks the start of what we consider the final phase of the movement. This phase will end only with a suitable and concrete response from the government, or, failing that, the sacrifice of thousands of people in defence of their lands and livelihoods.

Sincerely,

(Medha Patkar)
On behalf of the Narmada Bachao Andolan
58, Mahatma Gandhi Rd., Badwani-451551 (M.P.)
C-17/A, Munirka, New Delhi-110067

MEDIA STATEMENT OF BABA AMTE at Chhoti Kasaravad, M.P.
December 2, 1990.

Dear Friend,

When the entire nation seems to be in shambles and the fires of passions still unextinguished, the cool and pristine waters of Narmada and the people in the valley are sending the message - the message of people's development, the message to turn to the real issues facing our great nation. With bruised heart, from my sick bed I call unto you to stand by the resolute and courageous people in the Narmada valley, come out bravely and openly, in the unique endeavour, Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra (People's March for Development) to be launched from 25th December, 1990, from Rajghat (Badwani) in Madhya Pradesh. It is the time for all of us, who have their conscience unstained and unsold, to come on which side of the barricade we belong.

Friends, we share a common vision of our country; we all are striving, in our diverse preoccupations, to chart out a way of sane, sustainable and egalitarian, people oriented development. In turn, we all are opposing the destruction and desolation let loose by the power holders on our people and the political and economic fabric of our nation, that too in the name of 'Public Purpose', 'Development'...I know personally some of you and your efforts in the cause of true development. It becomes, therefore, doubly necessary for us to protect our dreams, and, surely, to make them a reality in the minds of people and in our national policy.

As you know, the struggle in Narmada valley against the destructive Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) and the Narmada Sagar (NSP) has come to symbolise the struggles we all are engaged in. The Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement), sustained by the tribals, peasants, labourers - men and women alike - in the Narmada valley has been a significant part of our Long March for True Development. The March is aimed for independence from the shackles of conventional slavish wisdom of development thriving on the design and money from multilateral agencies and multinational corporations; freedom from overbearing, centralising bureaucratic structure, killing people's initiative and their decisive participation; freedom from the capitalistic-consumerist pattern, which legitimises wanton destruction of the environment and unequal distribution with the help of epithets like 'necessary sacrifice for Public Purpose' on part of the tribals and other deprived sections of our people deemed as fait accompli.

However, people in every part of the nation are up in arms against this dubious version of development, be it in Tehri, Subarnarekha, Kaiga or Narmada. The people's struggles are being actively supported by 'organic intellectuals', the academicians, jurists, scientists, economists and environmentalists. You, my dear friends, too have been inalienable part of the Narmada Andolan, in your own way. You all know that civilisation is social order promoting cultural creation. I am sure that your unflinching honesty, your clear stream of reason and conscience will not allow you to be a spectator, or a mute admirer for the great struggle at this juncture.

The time has arrived to stand out openly against the hordes of looters of our beloved country, its people, its bountiful Nature, its economy, mortgaging the future of the country to the foreign moneylenders. I implore you to find political courage to stop the disastrous and cynical way that those in the garb of power holders are leading the nation. As for the people in the Narmada valley, let me assure you that the silent sufferers will no longer remain suppressed, depressed. For them, the Motherland is not like a portable suitcase. Narmada, as you know, has been created, according to mythology, from the sweat of Lord Shiva. For the peasants and tribals, it is the river of tears and sweat and any callousness on the part of the government will turn these tears in the volcano of unrest, I warn from my sick bed here at Kasaravad.

I appeal you to join in the Sangharsh Yatra, towards the direction of the Destruction Incarnate - the SSP. The people, resolved to fight out the issue in the Valley, will come out with a demand to resolve the issues in the larger frame of Development which we all cherish. Hundreds of organisations all over India will be participating in this March, making the Narmada issue a key issue in our Development Policy. I often remember the words:

> *First, it was a voice. Then it became a chorus of voices;*
> *Now, it is a swollen river of voices ...*

So, in your tongue, let me see the Law of Kindness; in your brain, distributive justice; and in your heart, affectionate care. May I expect from you the duty of the intellectual and philosophers - To Preach and Practice the Truth.

With warm regards and good wishes,

(Baba Amte)

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN

PRESS RELEASE

December 14, 1990

## EMINENT PEOPLE SUPPORT NARMADA SANGHARSH YATRA

The Sangharsh Yatra against the Sardar Sarovar (Narmada) Project, to start on Dec. 25, 1990, has received support from several eminent citizens of India. These people have signed an Appeal to the Nation, asking all those who are concerned with issues of ecological sustainability and human rights, to join in this march. The signatories are from diverse fields, including science, arts, academics, and social service. A full list of these people is given below, and a copy of their statement, with signatures, is attached.

This Appeal comes in the wake of the announcement, by the Narmada Bachao Andolan and several other support groups, that they have been forced to take up this direct action due to a number of factors:

(a) Work on the dam is continuing, despite the fact that the Union Ministry of Environment has categorically stated that environmental clearance has lapsed, and the Government of Gujarat needs to apply afresh for clearance. This has been reported in the Narmada Control Authority Environment Sub-group Agenda for the 9th Meeting. In effect, work on the dam is at present illegal, but since the government seems unwilling to stay the construction, the people of the Narmada Valley have decided to attempt stopping it themselves.

(b) Repeated attempts by the Andolan, to engage the Central and State governments in a serious and comprehensive dialogue on the issue, have met with a cold response. Even the former Prime Minister, Shri V.P. Singh's promise to have a dialogue (given in May 1990) has not been fulfilled. On the other hand, the M.P. State government has cracked down heavily on the Andolan activists and affected villagers, using repressive measures to try to break the movement. The people feel that they now have no option but to take direct action.

for (ASHISH KOTHARI)
on behalf of Narmada Bachao Andolan
C-17/A Munirka
New Delhi - 110 067

(For more information on the Sangharsh Yatra, please contact the above mentioned at 3318554 (office) or 386010 (Res.)

AN APPEAL TO THE NATION
SUPPORT THE STRUGGLE OF THE PEOPLE OF NARMADA VALLEY;
JOIN THE SANGHARSH YATRA STARTING DECEMBER 25, 1990.

Friends,

A growing number of groups and individuals in India are engaged in efforts at achieving just, humane, and sustainable development. The struggle in the Narmada Valley exemplifies this trend. It was this movement which catalysed the National Rally against Destructive Development, at Harsud, on September 28, 1989. The tens of thousands of people who participated on that day characterised the Narmada Project as a typical example of the short-sighted, exploitative development process adopted so far in India. They were asking: Is it justified to displace and dispossess millions of people in the name of a vague 'national interest'? Can a project be planned properly without consulting the people to be affected? Have the millions already displaced ever been rehabilitated properly? Is the loot of tribal lands in the name of development justified? Who really benefits, and who loses out, in massive 'development' projects like large dams?

If the Narmada Project is any indication, then activists and researchers have shown beyond doubt that most such projects are largely approved on the basis of a non-participative decision-making process, grossly distorted cost-benefit analysis, and inadequate environmental impact assessments. These facts remain so even today. Even the World Bank has had to repeatedly postpone its decision regarding further financial disbursements for Sardar Sarovar, and has even struck Narmada Sagar Dam off its list of potential credit-worthy projects. The Planning Commission Member in charge of Environment, as well as the Ministry of Environment and Forests, has warned Gujarat that their clearance for SSP has lapsed, since the conditions imposed at the time of clearance have not been met.

The struggle in the Narmada Valley has reached a decisive stage. On the one hand all the major doubts raised by the Narmada Bachao Andolan regarding the SSP, have of late been voiced secretly or openly by government agencies themselves. On the other hand, the project authorities are sparing no effort at discrediting the Andolan by levelling all kinds of false charges, and continuously misleading the public with large advertisements containing distorted data. Simultaneously the Madhya Pradesh Government has gone all-out to break the Andolan by repressive measures, including lathicharging of peaceful demonstrations, arrest of activists on false charges, and daily harassment of villagers and activists in the area.

Yet in all this, the local movement has become stronger. They have now announced the final phase of their movement — a Sangharsh Yatra, starting December 25. The plan is to have several thousand tribals and peasants, along with representatives of struggles all over India, take a pledge at Badwani, and then walk towards the dam site. There they will try to stop the work by offering Satyagraha, and will sit on dharna till the government gives in. This is a most serious action, and is bound to invite strong State reprisal. For this and other reasons, it is important for people from all over India to support it.

We appeal to you, as responsible citizens of India, to lend your active support to this action in December. The country must rally around this event, for from the Narmada struggle will emerge a lot of the lessons we can apply to other 'development' projects. From it also can emerge a truly all-India effort at achieving ecological security and social justice.

## ANWARA YATRA : LIST OF SIGNATORIES TO 'APPEAL TO THE NATION'

V.R. Krishna Iyer, former Chief Justice of India
Upendra Baxi, Professor of Law, University of Delhi
Sushila Bhan, Acting Member-secretary, ICSSR
Kishore Saint, Ubeshwar Vikas Mandal, Udaipur, Rajasthan
Rajni Kothari, Convenor, Independent Initiative, New Delhi
L.C Jain, ex-member, Planning Commission, New Delhi
Hiranmay Karlekar, Indian Express
J.P.S. Oberoi, Professor of Sociology, Delhi University
H.Y Mohan Ram, Dept. of Botany, University of Delhi
Ramachandra Guha, Lecturer, Institute of Economic Growth
Chhatrapati Singh, Indian Law Institute
S. Anandalakshay, Director, Lady Irwin College
Devaki Jain, Director, Institute for Social Studies Trust
Mansi Ram, lecturer, Miranda House
B.S. Baviskar, Professor of Sociology, University of Delhi
Imrana Qadeer, Centre for Social Medicine & Community Health (CSMCH), JNU
K.R. Nayar, CSMCH, JNU
Mohan Rao, CSMCH, JNU
Kamal Mitra Chenoy, School of International Studies, JNU
C.P. Chandrashekhar, Centre for Economic and Social Policy (CESP), JNU
Jayati Ghosh, CESP, JNU
Satish Jain, CESP, JNU
Amal Sanyal, CESP, JNU
Sunanda Sen, CESP, JNU
Krishna Bhardwaj, CESP, JNU
Sudipto Kaviraj, Centre for Political Studies (CPS), JNU
Rajeev Bhargava, CPS, JNU
Zoya Hassan, CPS, JNU
Kunal Chakrabarti, Centre for Historical Studies, JNU
Patricia Oberoi, Professor of Sociology, JNU
Mir Javed Hussain, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Kashmir
Abha Bhaiya, Jagori
Bhaskar Laxshaman Bhole, Professor, Nagpur University, Nagpur, Maharashtra
Anant Kashinath Bhale Rao, Journalist, Aurangabad, Maharashtra
Thakur Das Bang, Sarvodaya Leader, Wardha, Maharashtra
B.D. Sharma, Commissioner, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
Anand Swarup, Chairman, National Book Trust, New Delhi
S.C. Dube, Sociologist, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh
Bagaram Tulpule, Trade Unionist, Bombay, Maharashtra
Vijay Tendulkar, Playwright, Bombay, Maharashtra
A.R. Desai, Sociologist, Baroda, Gujarat
Vasant Palshikar, Educationist, Pune, Maharashtra
Shankar Guha Niyogi, Chhatisgarh Mukti Morcha, Raipur. Madhya Pradesh
Purushottam Sharma, State-Secretary, Indian People's Front, New Delhi
Swami Agnivesh, Bandhua Mukti Morcha, New Delhi
Abdul Jabbar, Bhopal Gas Pidit Mahila Sanghatan, Bhopal
Samsher Bisht, Uttarkhand Sangharsh Vahini, U.P.
B.P. Sinh Bagi, Shoshit Samaj Dal, Bihar.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Badwani, Madhya Pradesh
PRESS RELEASE
December 17, 1990.

A unique struggle will take place in the Narmada Valley from 25th December onwards, when thousands of men and women will start on a Long March - Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra - towards the site of the 'Destructive' Sardar Sarovar Dam, alongwith thousands of their supporters and like-minded movements and organizations, on a peaceful satyagrah to stop the work on the dam and a demand for their Right to Live. Starting off from Raj-Ghat near Badwani (M.P) after taking an oath on the banks of Narmada, they will be moving in the direction of the dam, and will not budge from their struggle until they make the State to respond.

The struggle in Narmada valley has reached a delicate and decisive juncture, braving the police brutalities, false propaganda, expensive media blitzes and questioning the prevalent anti-people model of development. People's organizations all over India as a token of solidarity with the struggle will be joining the Yatra, to project the Narmada issue as the vital national issue about our choices of development policy.

The Yatra will pass the roadside villages and major towns in Dhar, Jhabua districts in Madhya Pradesh, progressing towards the dam after crossing the Gujarat boundary after Alirajpur. The March will proceed with public meetings, street plays, intensive campaigning en route with dignitaries like Baba Amte, Swami Agnivesh, walking with tribals and peasants.

Intellectuals, journalists, social workers, economists, environmentalists and artists all over India have appealed to the people and people oriented organizations to express solidarity with the cause of the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Baba Amte too has appealed to the intellectuals to stand by and stand openly with the people and against the impending destruction to save our country.

An open letter was also sent to the Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar by the Narmada Bachao Andolan on 27th November, urging him to have a fresh thinking and immediate positive response to the issues raised by the Andolan since last five years. It clearly told him that the people in the Narmada Valley are fast losing faith in the government disappointed as they are with its record of broken promises, opportunistic politicking and complete disregard for non-violent people's movement. Unless fresh thinking and positive response from the government is there, the people will be compelled to direct action, the letter apprehended.

Social, political, environmental organizations, trade unions, student unions, tribal organizations all over India have expressed solidarity with the Yatra and resolved to participate in it.

Among them are Shoshit Jan Andolan (Maharashtra), Chhattisgarh Shramik Sangharsh Samiti, (M.P), Ganga Mukti Andolan (Bihar), Lok Adhikar Sangh and Parivartan (Gujarat). They further include from M.P. Prayog, Ekalavya, Chhattisgarh Mahila M. Mukti Morcha, Madhya Pradesh Swáichhik Sanstha Sangh, Sambhav, Kisan-Adivasi Sangh, Samata Sangathan, from Maharashtra Chhatra Bharti, YUWA, Nari Samata Manch, Samata Andolan, Bombay Natural History Society, while from Delhi Lokayan, Sahyog, Intach, National Campaign for Housing Rights, Kalpavriksh. Various organizations in Kerala, movements on Common Lands, and Samagra Vikas in Karnataka too expressed solidarity.

Numbers of meetings, seminars are being organised to discuss the issue of Narmada in the frame of alternative model of development. Resolutions in support of the Yatra are to be placed in the plenaries of Adivasi Sahitya Sammelan, Chhatra Bharati etc.

Nearly at the same time, number of tribal organizations all over India will be holding 'dharna' at Rashtrapati Bhavan from 27th December, to press for their right to live and the right against being deprived of their resource base. The organizations will raise the issue of Narmada as one of the onslaughts on the rights of the tribals and will be participating in the Yatra.

The peasants and tribals in the valley are in a defiant mood, ready to fight it out, as the village to village campaigning hots up. Despite continuous police harassment and repression, the mood is vibrant. With a series of rallies at Badwani, Kukshi, cycle march by the youths in the valley, and complete non-cooperation with the dam builders, the people are preparing for the Sangharsh Yatra. In the ranges of Satpuda, in Maharashtra, the tribal villagers of Danel bundled off the Special Officer for Resettlement. These villages have already declared their self government. Recently, a team of the World Bank had to face the wrath of the valley people. Alongwith SSP area, the Narmada Sagar or Harsud area too is gearing itself to participate in the March to save the valley.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN
PRESS STATEMENT
19.12.1990.

The Truth about the Meeting between Narmada Bachao Andolan and Mr. Babubhai Patel

It was at the initiative of the Kisan Sangathan of Gujarat that Swami Agnivesh accepted a mediator's role and a meeting was planned between Mr. Babubhai Jasbhai Patel, the Minister for Narmada Development, Government of Gujarat, and Smt. Medha Patkar accompanied by Advocate Girish Patel and Ashish Kothari on behalf of Narmada Bachao Andolan on 13th December, 1990.

Initially, the meeting was supposed to be an exploratory political dialogue but the Minister, to the surprise of the Andolan leaders, was accompanied by not less than ten senior most officials of the Sardar Sarovar (Narmada) Nigam, the Project authority.

Accepting the offer for such a dialogue, the Andolan once again expressed its willingness to have free and frank discussions. A brief exchange of the issues that have led them to oppose the project took place. The issues still stand unresolved. The government representatives like Mr. C.C. Patel, Chairman of the Nigam, wanted to convey the likelihood of discussing the rehabilitational and environmental protection policies and plans, but without going beyond that to the basic framework and questioning the Tribunal's decision or even the sanctions and conclusions since then. Andolan representatives, on the other hand, restated their proposal for the review of the Sardar Sarovar, with detailed issues, conceptual framework and the modus operandi. The proposal included the following:

1. The government should be willing to discuss all the aspects - social and environmental impact, right to life and livelihood, economic and financial viability as also the decision making process.

2. The process should be final and decisive.

3. Although with a time bound plan for such appraisal, the same should be undertaken after suspending the irreversible works at the Project like displacement and the related, clear felling of forests that is in submergence zone of Gujarat and is likely to begin in other states; and the construction that directly blocks the riverflow.

The Minister's statements in the press conference in Ahmedabad saying "the talks failed" or "the government would proceed with the work expeditiously, without any new look at the project" are either distorted or indicative of the decision on our proposal. We, however, hope that while on one hand the Minister conveys openness, serious proposals resulting out of dialogue will not be responded to only through public announcements and media, but in writing and with utmost seriousness. The recent most press statement also has two other major distortions:

1. The cost of the project announced to be Rs. 6406 crores in the press conference at Delhi on the 13th is reported to have escalated to Rs.9,000 crores as per the statement made on the very next day, in Ahmedabad. Not only is this symbolic of the government's propaganda being based upon wrong and outdated facts which keep changing, but they are yet not ready to give out the truth on the economic and financial aspects of the Project. The truth is that the cost escalation has nothing to do with the Gulf Crisis, since C.C. Patel's own report of August, 1988, has shown the cost to be Rs. 11, 154 crores and the Benefit-Cost ratio to be less than one, the minimum expected.

2. The announcement that the project would completed by 1998/2000 also is a political statement and neither an administratively approved nor a rational decision. Again, it was Mr. Patel's report (A Review of Implementation Schedule) in August, 1988, that recommended reducing the schedule to ten years in order to make the presently non-viable project viable. But, neither the Madhya Pradesh nor Maharashtra, and hence the Narmada Control Authority, as per our information, has as yet approved it. M.P., on the other hand, has objected to the loss in power generation (and in turn its share in power benefits) that would result from any such change.

This and all such other happenings are and will slowly but steadily prove that the issues we have been raising are true and basic. The project authorities and the people of Gujarat will have to concede the fact of this Project not being in their benefit nor for the benefit of the four states - parties to and beneficiaries of the Project - and the country as a whole.

The strong and determined mass movement, therefore, continues with the knowledge and analysis of reality and confidence in the people's power and right to live.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Badwani, Madhya Pradesh.
Press Release
24.12.1990.

Babubhai Patel Failed to meet the Deadline.

Despite the assurance at the meeting with the representatives of Narmada Bachao Andolan on 13th December, Mr. Babubhai Jasubhai Patel the Minister for Narmada Development in Gujarat, has failed to give any response to the proposal put forward by the representatives or present any other proposal till this date. Medha Patkar, Girishbhai Patel and Ashish Kothari met Mr. Babubhai Patel in Delhi, where Mr. Patel had agreed to respond to the proposals within a week. However, the Gujarat Minister did not keep the deadline. Both the sides had agreed that the next step of the Andolan will be decided on the basis of the response that the government will give. Mr. Patel conceded the fact as 'natural' if the Andolan starts its agitationist programme during the period of negotiations.

Now the representatives of Government of Gujarat, without answering to the Andolan's proposal and by-passing it, have started to meet Baba Amte in 'personal capacity' which exposes their hypocrisy. The veterans like Chunibhai Vaid, who were on probing mission on behalf of the government, in the Badwani area, seem to be awefully ignorant about the facts regarding the Sardar Sarovar Project as has been clear from his interactions with some activists.

Nevertheless, the Gujarat representatives had to face the questions of the people in the Narmada Valley. Babubhai Patel was stopped near Rajghat and was grilled by the informed representatives of the valley. Unable to answer the queries, the Minister had to declare that if the resettlement is found impossible, he will be the first to join the anti-dam agitation. Chunibhai Vaid had to accept that he does not know as to who would be the participants in the proposed 'anti-rally' in Gujarat, nor does he know whether they are from drought prone areas of Kutch and Saurashtra and North Gujarat with any concrete information about the Project. He differed with the plan of some organizations in the state to encircle the dam site with a human chain.

All the recent happenings are but a vindication of the stand taken by the Andolan and the issues raised by it. The people in the valley are determined not to be entangled in the deceptive forays on part of the Gujarat government, and are all prepared for the proposed Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra for their right to live.

SAHAYOG SAHAYOG SAHAYOG SAHAYOG SAHAYOG

## Press Note

**President suggest reduction in the height of Sardar Sarovar on Narmada and a dialogue with the affected People**

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Today a delegation of a large number of tribal organisations from all over the country met the President and appraised him about the problems and plight of the tribal people all over the country and their struggle for right to life. The basic issues raised by the delegation before the President were the right to life, their command over and continued use of natural resources such as land, water, forest and minerals and the distress caused due to massive displacement by the developmental projects.. The delegation in particular invited his attention to the confrontational attitude of the Gjarat Government towards the people staging a long-march for establishing their right not to move out of their homes and defy the States dictat.

The President /.. was convinced that a dialogue should be established with the affected people and he generally agreed with the delegation about the various issues which were raised before him in the memorandum. He said he was all for protection of their rights. He in particular mentioned that one possible way to lessen impact of displacement in the case of Sardar Sarovar would be to reduce the height so that displacement is greatly reduced. He assured that he will speak to the Prime Minister about this and the other issues raised before him and suggested that the delegation should also meet the Prime Minister and appraise the problems.

The delegation represented about 100 organisations from all over the country and was accompanied by Shri Puish Tirky, M.P. and Dr.B.D.Sharma, Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Prime Minister will be meeting the entire group of about 500 tribal representatives on Sunday the 30th at 9.15 A.M.

/..was with the delegation for more than half an hour and made pointed queries on many issues. He

TRIBALS' PADYATRA

# Gujarat Government set for confrontation

**From Our Special Representative**

AHMEDABAD, Dec 24. — The stage is set for a headlong confrontation on Narmada Dam issue with activists like Baba Amte and tribals of Madhya Pradesh launching a 150-km-long padyatra to the project site in Gujarat tomorrow.

The possibility of violence can hardly be ruled out as a human chain organized at the behest of the Chief Minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, is scheduled to resist the entry of marchers on the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border four days later.

The atmosphere has become a little more changed as Mrs Maneka Gandhi, Union Minister for Environment, refused to support the Rs 6,400-crore Government project besides criticizing big dams at a public meeting in Baroda yesterday.

The anti-project activists like Mr Girish Patel have indicated that about 10,000 representatives of voluntary organizations, environment groups and local tribals will join the long march from Barwani in Khargoan district of Madhya Pradesh to Kevadia colony, the dam site in Gujarat.

But the State Government fears that a lot more people, including the would-be oustees in M.P. will help swell the ranks of padyatris along the way. The Chief Minister had been busy last forth-night meeting representatives of different chambers of commerce and voluntary organizations, and has worked out an elaborate plan to counter the marchers.

A meeting of senior police officers was held recently and a counter-action plan drawn up. The plan includes physical resistance in case the marchers take a different route to dodge the human chain being organized at Fardi Kuva village on December 29, informed sources said.

The police has prepared a contingency plan to deal with surprises like change in the time of arrival of marchers.

Observation posts and horse-mounted police force are also likely to be used. Another possibility is the use of policemen in civil dress in the human chain at the border village.

On his part, Baba Amte has declared that the padyatris will offer peaceful satyagraha at any spot they are stopped. The Baba has expressed fears about the possibility of Madhya Pradesh Government opting for an "operation crush" even before the padyatris arrive at the Gujarat border.

Mrs Maneka Gandhi's statement in which she had cautioned the Gujarat Government that the clearance given by the Planning Commission to the Sardar Sarovar project and Narmada Dam project expires next April has come as a shot in the arm with the activist demanding a review of the project.

Mrs Gandhi who participated in the anti-project agitation and joined Baba Amte in addressing rallies a year back has now held the Gujarat Government guilty of ignoring the environmental and rehabilitation aspects. She said in Baroda yesterday that the State Government had yet to supply her Ministry the basic data and plans to counter the environmental fallout of the project. She described herself as "neutral" and unable to take sides on the controversy in the absence of basic data on a variety of issues including cost-benefit ratio.

The Chief Minister who was expected to personally oversee the organization of human chain and attempts to resist the marchers is somewhat hamstrung at the sudden challenge posed to his position by the BJP. The political circles are agog with the talk of the BJP attempting to topple his Ministry by luring away a section of the Janata Dal.

For Mr Patel, the campaign for the Narmada project is a device to revamp his image which is under severe strain following the communal riots in different parts of the State. But if the BJP succeeds in giving his political jolts, the Chief Minister will have to divert his attention to the immediate task of fire-fighting That will definitely weaken the human chain and enable the marchers to pass through.

Statesman 25 Dec. 1990

*"NARMADA ki ghati mein ab ladai jari hai"* (battle is now on in the Narmada Valley). This is the theme song of the 7,000-odd anti-dam marchers

'Independent' 26 Dec 90

# Thousands launch Narmada march with fiery pledges

Ranvir Nayar
in Barwani

SCORES OF lamps were immersed in the Narmada on a blazing Tuesday afternoon at Rajghat near Barwani to mark the start of the sangharsh yatra organised by the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Over 2,500 men, women and children from Barwani and its neighbouring villages are participating in the yatra led by Baba Amte, Medha Patkar and Swami Agnivesh.

Addressing the gathering, Amte said: "This is a fight of the poor and the tribals who have declared that they will no longer remain depressed or be exploited. This is a fight for the truth which is no longer the monopoly of the rich and the powerful," he declared to thunderous applause.

The march, he said, would inspire the labourers, the farmers and the poor. "From now on it is not 'do and die' just for me, but also for every old and young person of the Narmada valley," he said.

Medha Patkar, leader of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, declared that the Sardar Sarovar project represented an economy which had consumerism as its base. The tribals and the dispossessed had to challenge that system, she said.

During the past five years of her work in the valley she had come across many Mahatma Gandhis and Karl Marxes who were working for the upliftment of the poor in thier own dedicated manner, she said.

Amidst loud cheering she said: "Not even god has the right to grab land from the tiller without making a study of the project to be launched."

The Narmada project was being launched without any prior surveys or study of the impact it may have, she said.

Patkar denied that the movement had veered off its original course. The main aim of the movement had always been the humanitarian aspect, she said.

"We are not some 'Jangal bachao activists. We are fighting on a humanatarian basis."

Patkar declared her readiness to meet the government any time to discuss the issue. However, she said, the government should be honest. In the past the government had, by spreading falsehood and creating wrong impressions, tried to undo all her work in the valley, she said.

Patkar and Amte are part of a select group called the Samarpit Dal which will march to the site of the Sardar Sarovar project at Rajpipla in Gujarat.

The marchers will cover a distance of over 20 km in the next 10 days. They will pass through most of the [illegible] will be affected by the project.

Patkar said the yellow and black headbands worn by the Samarpit Dal stood for the boycott of the 'black' project which would destroy the Narmada (denoted by yellow).

Narsapur, about seven km from Barwani town, was closed yesterday in a gesture of sympathy with the march. Heavy police bandobust was made at the site though trouble was not anticipated, a senior police officer said.

The entire town, he said, agreed that the movement should be totally peaceful. He felt the movement was justified as it was not fair to dishouse so many people.

A villager said: "They can expect some support from us only if they rehabilitate at least 50 per cent of the families displaced."

Noted lawyer from Ahemdabad Girish Patel said the Gujarat government had been constantly shifting its stance on the issue. The government, he said, had not even made up its mind about the cost of the project.

**PTI reports:** The anti-Narmada march was joined by leaders of the internationally acclaimed Chikyu On Tomo (Friends of the Earth), Japan, the organisation responsible for scuttling Japanese aid of billions of rupees to the Sardar Sarovar project.

# Narmada body protests against DD 'bias'

THE NARMADA Bachao Andolan has, in a telegram to union minister of state for information and broadcasting Sanjay Singh, protested against Dooradarshan's "biased" coverage of the ongoing struggle in the Narmada valley.

The Andolan has said that Doordarshan had always sought to blank out any news regarding the five-year struggle. Doordarshan, it alleged, had always sought to support the "continued exploitation of the people in the valley by giving a one-sided picture of the Sardar Sarovar project."

The telegram said Doordarshan was once again indulging in biased reporting as was rendered obvious by the coverage of the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra launched near Barwani on Tuesday.

The Andolan spokesman alleged that adverstisements on the Sardar Sarovar project issued by the Narmada Control Authority in some English dailies in Indore were "unethical" as they gave a wrong impression about the Gujarat government's resettlement programmes for the Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra oustees.

Ranvir Nayar
in Nisarpur

He said the advertisment claimed that 78 families had been resettled in Gujarat. However, he claimed, all of them had returned to their village as they had found the land in Gujarat too barren for agriculture and the village lacking in basic amenities.

The spokesman asked the government to issue details of the 2000 families it claimed would be resettled.

He said that 50 persons from the village had stated that they would not go to Gujarat, while just a handful of families from the Charanfalia area of Katarkheda village were ready to go as they had migrated from Gujarat in the recent past and were keen on returning if they were given free land and other facilities.

He also refuted NCA claims that 76 families from Jalsindhi and Ankadia had gone to Gujarat for resettlement. He said though these families had given their consent for resettlement in Gujarat a long time ago, none of them had gone so far. He claimed that these families had given their consent under extreme pressure from the Gujarat government. He alleged that the government had hired some goondas to threaten the villagers.

Referring to an advertisement issued by the some private party in Indore, the spokesman said it had been issued by one Sakargai, a contractor working on the project, who obviously had vested interests in it.

Meanwhile, Yukio Tanaka, a representative of the Japanese organisation Chikyu on Tomo (Friends of the Earth), has refuted the suggestions of NCA chairman C C Patel that Japan is reconsidering its decision of withdrawing aid to the project.

Addressing newsmen at Barwani on Tuesday, Tanaka said some members of the Japanese parliament were even thinking of issuing an appeal to the World Bank asking it to withdraw its assistance to the project.

Tanaka, along with four other members of the Chikyu on Tomo, is here to express solidarity with the Narmada valley struggle. He said the Friends of the Earth would support any struggle that was likely to destroy the environment and displace the poor.

Independent 27 Dec, 90

# 'We can't desert our Narmada'

By LESTER COUTINHO
The Times of India News Service

SILKUA (Madhya Pradesh),
December 27.

AS the sun sets on the Narmada valley, the 2,500 rallyists of the Narmada Jan Vikas Sangarsh Yatra get ready to spend another night in the cold open fields on the outskirts of this little village.

After the villagers have completed the formalities of welcoming the tired participants, the latter start settling down in little groups around the tractors that accompanied them from their respective villages. The locals have put up a lighted podium which illuminates the dark landscape.

Silence reigns after the initial bustle of activity but slowly the camp comes to life after the rallyists have their supper and have warmed themselves around bonfires.

The beating of drums begins and soon groups gather around the drum-beaters and start singing and dancing. A variety of tunes are played over the public address system and soon things get going. The enterprising marchers, sing songs about their struggle against the construction of the dam on the Narmada river, filled with sentiments and emotions about their love for the valley *"Narmada maya ke godh me pale hum, aab maya ko chodke nahi jayange* (we have been brought up in the womb of mother Narmada, now we cannot desert our mother."

Some talk about the destruction that will come about because of the Sardar Sarovar project. There is also light entertainment which the audience enjoys the most.

Then their leaders and the activists of the Narmada Bachao Andolan meet to discuss and review the day's happenings as well as the media coverage. They also discuss plans for the next day and tasks and assigned.

News about preparations by the Gujarat government to prevent the rally from entering the state is the main topic of discussion. But even details of massive police security do not waver them. On the contrary, they feel all the more determined and raise the slogan, *"koi nahi hatega, bandh nahi banega* no one will leave, the dam will not be built."

As the rallyists move back to their respective groups and the entire camp falls into a lumber, the only sounds a listener could hear are that of an old man coughing or a child crying.

At the crack of dawn, the camp starts coming to life again, with the beating of drums and singing of songs. The rallyist start preparing for another day of march towards their destination — the Sardar Sarovar dam site.

Just a 100 kilometres away on the Gujarat-MP border another camp comes to life at Frekuva village, but that is of another kind. A whistle is blown and hundreds of police personnel in khaki shorts and banians start lining up for the morning drill. The camp is lined with scores of government and police vehicles.

The fields around the area have been readied for setting up of a huge pandal and cleared for a helipad. The Gujarat chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, is expected to land there.

A massive police force has been deployed all along the inter-state boundary, especially at Frekuva Panvad and Kavart.

Various voluntary organisations, assisted by the Gujarat government, have been preparing to hold a pro-Narmada rally there. The otherwise sleepy Chhota Udaipur and Frekuva have suddenly come to life with vehicles transporting materials for the rally.

Though the Gujarat government has preferred to identify the march with Baba Amte, this does not appear to be true, going by the sentiments expressed by the marchers. "I am ready to die" says Janki, a tribal woman. She had already told the people in her village that she may never come back home.

Radeshyam another marcher, says "we are going to die anyway when the water submerges our villages. So we might as well die now fighting for our rights."

A notable feature is the participants have sunk all their caste and class differences because of the cause. So while the poorer participants have just brought a few belongings the better-off have brought food stocks for all. The 30-odd tractors moving with the march are packed with firewood and food stocks to last at least a month. They have also managed to bring enough diesel and are prepared to camp outside the Gujarat boundary till such time as they are allowed entry.

A special cell called "Samarpan Dal" a group of committed people, is leading the yatra and they have sworn by the holy Narmada that they will not return till they are successful.

Ms Medha Patkar, of the Narmada Andolan, said that the fact that the Gujarat government was gearing up in a massive way to face what was essentially a people's rally was already a moral victory for the marchers. "The government cannot turn a deaf ear to the people now."

She said the agitation was neither against the Gujarat government or the people of the state, but was meant to pressure the Central government to stop all the irreversible work of the dam until the entire project was reviewed.

SHAILENDRA TASHWANT

Times of India 28 December, 1990

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN: ACTION ALERT
December 28, 1990

The Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra, in which thousands of tribals and peasants of the Narmada Valley and representatives of support groups and movements from all over the country are participating, enters its fourth day today. As more and more people join the Yatra along the way, there is news that the Government of Gujarat (GOG) is preparing to counter it with full state power. GOG is also attempting to create a situation of confrontation between the people of Gujarat and the people of the valley. The atmosphere is getting increasingly tense, and there is urgent need for groups, movements, and individuals across the country to take some action.

The Government of Gujarat has so far responded to the Yatra, and the demand of the Narmada Bachao Andolan to halt construction on the Sardar Sarovar Project pending a comprehensive review, in two ways. One, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shri Chimanbhai Patel, has communicated his desire to meet Baba Amte to avoid a situation of confrontation. Yet simultaneously, he has been issuing press statements which distort the situation, e.g. saying that Baba Amte's friends have informed him that Baba is not interested in stopping the dam. Second, the Madhya Pradesh - Gujarat border is being sealed, with an estimated 30,000 strong police force (according to senior police officials), and a so-called "human wall" of 1 lakh people who are being bused and trucked to the spot.

The Andolan, and Baba Amte, have responded to Shri Chimanbhai Patel's letter to Baba by reminding him that a detailed proposal for a dialogue has been given to Shri Bababhai Patel, Minister for Narmada in Gujarat, by the Andolan. There has been no response to it, on the contrary, the Gujarat Government is repeatedly stating that on no condition will work on the dam be suspended. In this situation, Chimanbahi's offer for a dialogue with Baba Amte is an obvious attempt at public relations, to make it appear that he (Chimanbhai) is ready for talks while the Andolan is not. Also, both the Gujarat and M.P. Governments are singling out Baba Amte, completely ignoring the people's representatives from every village who are leading the Andolan. There is an obvious attempt to create a rift between Baba and the Andolan.

Simultaneously, the M.P. Government's Minister of Water Resources, Shitlabhai Sahay, has publicly raised suspicions about the role of agencies/groups from outside the valley in the Yatra, asking what their motivations are for joining the Yatra. The Narmada Valley Development Authority Chairman Sharad Jain has put a wild figure of 36 lakh rupees as the cost of the Yatra, and wondered where this money has come from! The credentials of the representatives of Friends of the Earth, Japan, who are in the Yatra have been questioned.

It is clear that neither the M.P. nor the Gujarat Government is willing to seriously consider the Yatra's demands. As the Yatra moves towards the Gujarat border, it is imperative that all groups and individuals concerned with human rights and environmental issues respond, by sending urgent letters to:

a) The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Sunderlal Patwa
b) The Chief Minister of Gujarat, Chimanbhai Patel
c) The Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Sharad Pawar
d) The Prime Minister of India, Chandra Shekhar.

The letters should contain a demand to :

a) Respond positively to the legitimate demands of the Yatra, regarding the right to life and lifestyle of the people of Narmada Valley.
b) Stop immediately the intensive misinformation campaign being spread by the State.
c) Halt the massive build-up of police at the border, and the despicable attempt to create a confrontation between the people of Gujarat and the people of Narmada Valley.

PRESS STATEMENT issued from Alirajpur, M.P.
28.12.1990.

Organisations Supporting Narmada Bachao Andolan Condemn Minister's Statement.

Several organisations participating in the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra by the Narmada Bachao Andolan have strongly criticised the recent statement by the Minister of Irrigation of Madhya Pradesh, Mr. Shitla Sahay, as 'irresponsible and undemocratic' in which he doubted the sincerity of these organisations in supporting the anti-Sardar Sarovar movement in the state.

In a statement issued at the Phata (Alirajpur), where the Yatra had its third camp yesterday, these organisations took strong exception to the Minister's description of them as 'outsiders' and cautioned him not to further divide our society on the basis of such parochial considerations. They asserted their right to participate in any movement and struggle anywhere in India striving for justice and equality. How come the Minister dare to object to their participation in the Narmada struggle when our country has been supporting the human rights movement in South Africa and elsewhere all over the world? they asked. Maintaining that the Narmada Bachao Andolan is an important landmark in the long struggle for true development, these organisations have asserted that they have been a part of the Narmada Andolan and will continue to participate in future too.

The organisations made it clear that there is nothing wrong if any people's organisation from abroad participates in or supports the cause in India, as the problems of the day transcend national barriers and have become a part of the larger global polity. When the decision makers in the country themselves take decisions in the context of the international forces, it is perfectly legitimate to counter these anti-people decisions from that level, they suggested.

Describing the Narmada struggle as a 'valiant fight' by the tribals, peasants and labourers in the Narmada Valley the organisations brushed off criticism by the Minister on the integrity of the Andolan.

The supporting organisations include Chhattisgadh Mukti Morcha, Ekta Parishad, Prayog, Ekalavya from M.P., Shoshit Jan Andolan, YUWA, Jan Vikas Andolan from Maharashtra, Chhatrabharti from Maharashtra, Bhopal Gas Pidit Mahila Udyog Sangathan, Vedchhi Pradesh Seva Samiti (Guj), Sahyadri (Kerala), Save Western Ghat Movement.

# Police set to prevent dam row

FERKUVA (Gujarat), Dec. 28 (PTI).

HEAVY police "bandobust" has been made in the Ferkuva village on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border to prevent any showdown between the activists of the pro-and anti-Narmada project here on December 30 or 31.

Over 1,500 policemen, bolstered by hundreds of home guards, were deployed in this sleepy village where activists against the Mega Narmada dam led by the fenowned social worker, Baba Amte, who have threatened to stop the construction, will be challenged by the project supporters by forming a "human wall" to block their entry.

Baba Amte and environmentalists, who see the dam as a "symbol of destruction" set off on their march from Badwani in Madhya Pradesh on December 25, while the pro-Narmada lobbyists who consider the project a lifeline for Gujarat are pouring into the village in thousands.

Both have declared that their agitation would be peaceful.

The authorities are still in the dark about the exact date of the arrival of Baba Amte and the marchers and the path they would take. However, the pro-Narmada activists are determined to stay here until they prevents the entry of the Baba Amte-led march.

The district authorities said there were three routes the anti-Narmada activists could take, adding that they had not, however, taken any decision to seal the entry points to Gujarat.

The Gujarat chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, who has declared his firm resolve to go ahead with the project, will arrive here tomorrow to address a rally in support of the project.

Top police officials are camping at the Kewadiya colony, near the dam site in Broach district to supervise security arrangements. The police have been deployed at eight points, including some hilly areas from where the anti-Narmada marchers may try to sneak into the site.

According to reports here, they were planning to divide themselves into three groups and enter Gujarat from three different places, including Ferkuva.

The ranks of Baba Amte are swelling as they traverse through the villages and their 'Narmada jan vias sangarsh yatra", now in Jhabua district, is being led by a band of the "samarpam dal" which has taken a pledge on the banks of the Narmada not to return till they achieve their objective.

Meanwhile, various farmers' organisations in Broach district have announced their plans to take a march to the site to join the pro-Narmada march spearheaded by the Narmada foundation trust and "Narmada abhiyan" (Narmada campaign) and various other voluntary organisations.

The Gujarat government and some veteran Gandhians made efforts to dissuade Baba Amte from continuing the march but in vain.

Mr Patel has also sent a message to the social worker on December 25 in this regard. Responding to the message, Baba Amte said yesterday that he was prepared for a dialogue provided it was held with an "open mind".

The Rs 10,000-crore multi-purpose Narmada project is an inter-state venture of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan with a terminal major dam on the Narmada in Gujarat, and is said to be the largest water resource development project in the country.

Over Rs 1,000 crore had already been sunk on the project, called Sardar Sarovar in Gujarat and Narmada Sagar in Madhya Pradesh.

Meanwhile, the chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, has said there was no question of meeting Baba Amte as he had taken a rigid stand on his demand for reviewing the whole Narmada project and therefore, the meeting with him had been postponed.

Mr Patel said in a statement in Gandhinagar, that he had expressed his willingness to see the social worker before his rally entered the state to prevent a confrontation, but Baba Amte had changed his attitude towards the project.

The chief minister, who will be addressing the pro-Narmada rally at Ferkuwa tomorrow, said the Narmada development minister, Mr Babubhai Patel, had met environmentalists in New Delhi recently and had clarified three points, including the question of reducing the dam's height and stoppage of the dam works.

Times of India

29 Dec, 90

# 'No pre-conditions for Narmada talks'

FERKUVA (Baroda), Dec. 29 (PTI).

THE chief minister of Gujarat, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, today categorically refused to meet and hold dialogue with the social activist Baba Amte "on pre-conditions of reviewing and re-examining the project."

Talking to reporters here, Mr Patel said, in reply to his letter, dated December 25, to Baba Amte, expressing his desire to have a dialogue with him to avoid any kind of confrontation. Baba Amte had replied that the dialogue could be held on the condition of reviewing and re-examining the project.

Baba Amte is now leading the anti-Narmada peace march to the site of the inter-state Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP).

The chief minister said the condition was not acceptable to the state government and people of Gujarat as the Narmada tribunal award was declared in 1974 after a long process of review and examination of all the aspects, including those of environment and rehabilitation of oustees.

The World Bank also had sanctioned the loan for the project after considering all these aspects, he pointed out, and added that the project was accepted by all the concerned and beneficiary states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

Mr Patel reiterated that the government would not cow down to any threat or pressure to stop the works or to reduce the height of the dam.

The tribunal had fixed the height of the dam at 470 ft inspite of the state government's demand for 515 ft, and the government had accepted it, he said.

The construction works of the project, which was a life-line to Gujarat, had started at the dam site at Navagam in Broach district, he added.

ALI RAJGHAT (Jhambua, MP): The Jan Vikas Sangrash Yatra, led by Baba Amte, arrived here today on its last half in Madhya Pradesh, even as the Gujarat-M.P. border was sealed off with the deployment of police by the Gujarat government.

About 3,000 policemen and hundreds of plainclothesmen were positioned on the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border near the Ferkuva village in Baroda district.

The yatra, joined by 3,000 tribal men and women representing 20 social organisations all over the country, reached here after a night's halt at Lasmani village.

Meanwhile, addressing a press conference, Baba Amte announced that the yatra would continue its journey to the dam site, despite counter rally by pro-Narmada activists and deployment of police.

Baba Amte said, "If I can't solve a problem of Narmada oustees, then I am probably deadwood." I am pained and shocked to know about massive deployment of police by the Gujarat government on the border areas."

He deplored the attitude of the Gujarat government, which, Amte said, was inciting the people of the state against the yatra.

Another activist, Ms Medha Patkar said displacement of project-affected people was detestable and their rehabilitation was impossible.

Our staff reporter adds: The Narmada Bachao Andolan has accused the Gujarat government and its police of attempting to unleash violence on the marchers of the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra and spreading the canard that Baba Amte is "a foreign agent".

The andolan, in a press release issued here today, said government agencies were taking draconian measures to prevent the people from Maharahstra and Gujarat from joining the Sangharsh Yatra.

"The Gujarat government has unofficially sealed its borders and imposed prohibitory orders under Section 144 to prevent inter-state movement. Bus services between Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat are being suspended and police are patrolling the length of the Narmada to prevent the yatra from moving downstream by boat," the andolan said.

The Times Of India 29 Dec. 90

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Ferkuwa, M.P.-Gujarat border
Press Statement
29.12.1990.

As thousands of people from the agrarian and tribal belt of the Narmada valley converge in Alirajpur today on their fifth day of the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra, the Long March on foot towards the Sardar Sarovar Project, they are faced with the massive show of strength by the commercial, industrial forces in Gujarat along with the religious institutions and the State. This sums up the kind of struggle we have been waging and the future struggle that may take shape. Elaborate police arrangements and the sumptuous, luxury-bus ridden 'counter rally' and the crude initiative of the state including the Chief Minister of Gujarat, speaks volumes about the moral victory of the struggle by the people in the Narmada Valley. In fact the people will take this occasion as an opportunity to talk with the people of Gujarat and start a process of genuine dialogue, albeit the people in Gujarat may arrive there under the 'protection' of guns and lathis wielded against the agitationists.

The Sangharsh Yatra, at this important stage, again reiterates its call to stop the construction and other related work about the dam and to start for a comprehensive review of the Narmada Project in the light of the issues, facts and principles that have emerged in the last 5 years of the movement, and that too with the participation of the people in the valley. At each leg of the Yatra we have been reiterating the call.

However, the concerned governments, be it Gujarat or Madhya Pradesh, show abysmal lack of sensitivity and have resorted to falsehood, cheap tactics and rhetoric along with the 'Big Brotherly' repressive stance.

The Gujarat Chief Minister and his collegues tried in vain to employ time-consuming, and of course non-genuine tactics, a mere show of conducting a dialogue, by-passing the people's organisations and the issues at stake. The paradox became clear when the Gujarat government was not at all ready to discuss the basic issues about the project. On the other hand it created a show of dialogue through the 'purely' personal visits of its Minister and conduits with Baba Amte. Targetting on Baba Amte, who has staked his life against the destructive dam, the government tried to isolate the movement and the venerable individual. However, both the people and Mr. Amte are aware of this abject effort on the part of the power holders. On the other hand, the Madhya Pradesh government has repeated its pet and laughable charges about the Andolan. The people and organzations all over the nation have answered these 'challenges' by the minister.

Despite the chilly nights of December and hostile attitude of the power holders, the people in the Narmada valley are firm in their resolve. 'The more adamant the goverment becomes, the more resolute we become.' That's what they are saying. If the government tries to pit the people of Gujarat, our brethren, against us on the border at Ferkuwa, or elsewhere, we will happily try to converse and establish a dialogue with them; and if the power holders - the contractors, industrialists, the commercial interests and the state - make this impossible, we will tread the path shown by the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, and extend our non-violent and peaceful action as the course of events may require.

PRESS STATEMENT
29.12.90

No Possibility of Japan Giving Aid for the Sardar Sarovar

Leading environmentalist from Japan, Mr. Yukio Tanaka, today ruled out any possibility of reconsideration of the decision by the Japanese government to suspend the 25 billion yen loan for the controversial Sardar Sarovar project. Mr. Tanaka who is representing the Japanese environmental group 'Friends of the Earth' said that the Foreign Ministry of Japan remains unconvinced by the representations of Mr.C.C. Patel, Chairman Narmada Nigam Ltd. The Japanese team which will be visiting India next year is in no way related to SSP and is a regular annual general review mission for considerations of total fiscal demands of the year, he informed.

According to his information, barely 3 weeks ago the loan agreements amounting to 110 billion Yen were concluded wherein there is no mention of SSP. The Indian delegation reportedly met very few and mostly unimportant officials, members of Parliament (Diet) and members of the press, who were quite unimpressed by the presentations of Mr. C.C. Patel.

The decision to suspend the aid to power component of the SSP was taken after the Japanese government came to the conclusion that no proper studies and plans had been made for social and environmental effects. The strong movement in the valley has made it amply clear to the Japanese government that the project was undertaken without consulting the people or by their consent. Mr. Tanaka and his organisation 'Friends of the Earth' were instrumental in creating awareness in Japan about SSP, which led to the suspension of Japanese aid eventually.

The members of the Japanese Diet will soon petition the World Bank to withdraw from the projects, he said. Japan incidentally is the second largest contributor to the World Bank after the USA.

# Amte 'no' to talks unless govt acts

Ranvir Nayar
in Kukshi

BRAVING COLD weather, the Narmada Bachao activists, led by Amte and Megha Patkar, entered Jhabua district last evening even as the Gujarat government began preparations for a massive pro-Narmada rally near Farekuva on the MP-Gujarat border, and chief minister Chimanbhai Patel asked Amte to meet him before entering Gujarat as part of the yatra.

Amte, however, has turned down Patel's offer of talks, saying until the government took some steps as decided during past meetings, there could be no further talks on the Sardar Sarovar Project.

Amte was reacting to the letter Patel sent him at Rajghat on Tuesday after the Narmada Sangharsh Yatra began.

Amte said that during the talks of the Narmada Bachao Andolan with farmers' leaders from Gujarat and Babubhai Jashubhai Patel on December 13, 1990, B J Patel had assured the NBA that the Gujarat government would convey its reaction to the NBA's conditions for negotiations within a week. "We are still awaiting the reaction of the government before we start any fresh negotiations." Amte told *The Independent*.

Amte has also decried the government's attempts to ignore the NBA, and instead call him as an individual to holding negotiations. He said this was an attempt to create divisions within the movement and also to defame the yatra by portraying it as stubborn.

He said that had already tried to initiate a dialogue with the govt for a comprehensive review of the project. He demanded that pending the talks and the review the govt should stop construction work, and the destruction of forests.

Amte said there was not much point in holding talks if the government was unwilling to fulfill the conditions.

Leader of the NBA, Megha Patkar alleged that Patel's letter was part of government strategy to defame the movement and also to break the NBA. She said that the govt had always tried to do so by making Amte the centre of its overtures and completely blanking out the NBA from the scene.

"The NBA has its base from the Satpuras to Nimad, and we draw strength from the farmers and tribals of the region. By ignoring us the government is trying to ignore the masses of the area," she said.

Patkar said the situation had remained unchanged since March 1990 when an NBA resolution, stipulating conditions had been passed.

"We had made this clear to Babubhai Patel in our talks with him on December 13, and he had assured us of a response from the government within a week. We had told them that the talks had to start before the launch of the March. The fact that they waited till March indicates that the government is not serious," she alleged.

Patkar added that Babubhai had met Amte once again on December 20, knowing full well that the talks would not yield any result as no individual had been authorised to take decisions for the valley. "Not Amte, not I; the decision making committee of the NBA is the only authorised body to decide."

The Narmada Sangharsh Yatra, which received tremendous response on its launch from Rajghat on December 25, continued to make waves in the villages it passed through on its way to the site of the Sardar Srovar Dam in Gujarat.

The yatra which started with 2,500 persons has over 3,500 persons, about half of them women. A large number of people keep joining it as it passed through their villages. The yatra covers about 20 kilometres everyday, after which the participants stage cultural programmes sending the NBA's message in the villages they halt in. A large number of tribals from Maharashtra are expected to join the yatra at Alirajpur on December 29.

NARMADA DAM ISSUE

# Setback to Gujarat CM's plan

From SAIBAL DASGUPTA

NANGAO (M.P.), Dec 28. — The padyatris opposing the Narmada project seem set to frustrate the Gujarat Chief Minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel's elaborate plans to stonewall their entry from Madhya Pradesh with the help of a human chain and exact political mileage out of the confrontation.

For one thing, 10,000 agitationists led by Baba Amte and Swami Agnivesh are not likely to enter Gujarat at the appointed time tomorrow when Mr Patel will be addressing a Government-sponsored rally at Ferkuva village on the border.

The marchers, whose strength has been steadily increasing from the initial 2,500 at the starting point, Barwani, in Madhya Pradesh since December 25, will also be joined by project-affected tribals from Maharashtra before stepping into Gujarat on Sunday. By then the human chain would have dissolved and pro-Narmada dam people dispersed.

"Our plans have misfired. We have been misled by incorrect intelligence from the police," moaned Mr Narpatsinh Chavda, president of the Gujarat unit of the Janata Dal and a protege of the Chief Minister today. He indicated that the Government was engaged in formulating a crash alternate strategy as the Chief Minister's prestige was involved.

What happens, for instance, if the marchers opt for a sit-in for five days on the border on the Madhya Pradesh side? Or, if a section of the agitationists have already infilterated into Gujarat and ready to storm the heavily barricaded Kevadia Colony, the dam site?

These are some of the questions dogging the Gujarat Government which has made a prestige issue and involved various chambers of commerce and voluntary organizations besides the tribals on the Gujarat side of the border in the fight against the anti-project activists.

These are some of the cautious questions that the Gujarat police has not been able to answer. The Gujarat Government will have to depend on the police machinery which has sealed the through passes and even the jungle routes along the 40 km border. What is more, some ugly situation is likely to take place, particularly in view of the Inspector-General of Police, Mr P. K. Datta, stating that the whole lot of marchers, including Baba Amte, will be arrested if they dare to set foot on Gujarat soil.

On the Gujarat side, social workers and several Janata Dal leaders had organized a human wall with tribals carrying bows and arrows while several volunteer and religious organizations have extended financial support. For instance, the Swaminarayan Religious Cult today despatched 25,000 food packets for the pro-project tribals in seven trucks.

Despite all arrangements, the Chief Minister's plan to involve the people directly against the anti-project activists and whip up passions with the aim of diverting public attention from his own political instability is likely to prove futile.

Independent. 29 Dec, 90

Statesman. 29 December 90.

# Alirajpur likely to be turning point in yatra

Ranvir Nayar
in Alirajpur

THE NARMADA 'sangharsh yatra' reaches the mostly tribal town of Alirajpur in Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh today. It will mark the halfway point in the 250-km march to protest against the Sardar Sarovar Project across the river Narmada.

Alirajpur might well turn out to be the turning point in the yatra. For it is there that the tribals of Maharashtra and Gujarat will join the yatra along with the representatives of various support groups and other non-governmental organisations from all over the country.

Meanwhile, the Gujarat government has unofficially sealed its borders and prohibitory orders under section 144 have been promulgated to prevent inter-state movement.

However, 3,000 tribals from Maharashtra entered Madhya Pradesh through Gujarat. Bus services between Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat are being suspended.

**Four journalists, including this correspondent, were detained by the Gujarat authorities for 90 minutes and questioned.**

According to the leader of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Medha Patkar, over 1,000 persons are expected to join the march at Alirajpur. These include tribals from 33 villages of Dhulia district in Maharashtra who will be displaced as a result of submergence. Besides, people affected by canal projects in Gujarat will also be joining in.

The Shoshit Jan Andolan representing the tribals and the dalits of Maharashtra, the Gramoday Chetana Mandal of Bastar district of Madhya Pradesh, Sahyog, a platform of various tribal movements all over the country, and some organisations from Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan will take part in the protest.

The agenda at Alirajpur will include a press conference and a general meeting in the evening followed by a night-long appraisal of the march by the various participating organisations. "The morale of the people has been quite high throughout the march and it is likely to remain so. Yet a constant monitoring of the pulse of the participants is necessary," Patkar said.

She claimed that as a result of extensive media coverage, the march and the issues behind it had featured in the public's mind like never before. Public opinion is increasingly turning against big dams, she said, and this has put the government under tremendous pressure to respond to the situation immediately.

"However, a statement by Madhya Pradesh irrigation minister Sheetla Sahay indicates the tough job we have in front of us," Patkar said. Sahay had in a press conference on Wednesday raised questions about the the presence of "outsiders" in the march.

Baba Amte, who has been one of the moving forces behind the march, said the media's coverage of the yatra had been distorted. Amte, who turned 77 on Wednesday, said, "The best birthday gift I can receive is perhaps fair coverage from the media.

Amte, a Magsaysay award winner, celebrated his birthday along with 3,500 yatris at a small village called Kukshi in Dhar district. He told *The Independent* that he had been accused by the press of being an "agent of foreign agencies bent upon destroying the country" and even having accepted money from these agencies. In reality, he said, he had refused to accept various international awards presented to him. "The fact that I did not go abroad to accept these awards should be enough to silence my critics. However, the press refuses to see these things and instead toes the line propagated by some politicians," he said.

Amte ruled out the chance of a confrontation between anti- and pro-dam activists when the yatra enters Gujarat. "I would rather die than see a confrontation between people," he said adding, "after trying to knit the country by my Bharat jodo yatra I would rather not see people fighting over this issue."

He however clarified that this did not mean that he would call off the yatra due to fear of violence. "When I left Rajghat on Tuesday it was with a determination to carry on the struggle regardless of the harmful effects it might have on me," he said.

"I will plead with tears to the people of Gujarat and to chief minister Chimanbhai Patel and ask them to listen to the voice of the people of the valley," he said. He alleged that Patel was trying to balkanise the country on the issue. "One can have differences of opinion but why make them differences of hearts," he said, adding that he would pray that god gives the chief minister *sad buddhi*.

Amte reiterated that there was no question of holding talks with Patel until he fulfilled the three conditions set by the andolan and conveyed to the government on December 13. He said it was clear that the government was not keen or serious about negotiations. The three conditions were aimed at ensuring that no irreversible changes occur in the valley while the talks are going on, he said. The conditions are the stoppage of all construction in the valley, the suspension of acquisition of land and a halt to deforestation for either rehabilitation or as a result of submergence.

The struggle is an expression of the anger of the people of the valley but the Gujarat government has opted to behave like an ostrich and ignore the movement. Amte said that henceforth development should be based on the theme of "sufficiency for all before there is superfluity for some." The andolan is a symbolic struggle in that direction and questions development models where the right to life and the basic needs of people is denied.

On the peopular support for the dam in Gujarat, Amte said it was very easy to "hypnotise the public." He referred to the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi issue and said, "Weren't the people hypnotised by the rath yatra? In its greed for the giant size, the government has created a monster that is threatening to get out of their own hands," he said.

Independent: 29 Dec, 90

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Chandpur, M.P.
PRESS RELEASE
30-12-1990

Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra Reaches Gujarat Boundary:
Gujarat Government Demonstrates Moneypower.

The Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra reached Chandpur near the Gujarat border on New Year's Eve on the seventh day since the start of the Yatra. The Yatra started from Rajghat near Badwani in Khargone District of Madhya Pradesh on December 25.

Yesterday the tribals from Akrani and Akkalkuva tehsils of Dhule District of Maharashtra joined the rally here by the thousands, braving a 200-km walk over the hilly tracts of the Satpudas, following Gujarat police's atrocious attempts to prevent them from crossing Gujarat to Alirajpur which would have been a shorter way.

The people of Alirajpur gave a rousing reception to the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra as it entered here in the morning yesterday. Local tribals and others danced and beat drums and cymbols on the occasion and threw gulal in a tumultuous welcome.

Later in the afternoon, the tribals from Dhule, Dhar and Jhabua arrived in the town from another end, dancing, singing and shouting slogans.

In the evening addressing the meeting at the Club Ground, the leader of Narmada Bachao Andolan, Ms. Medha Patkar said, "It appears that the Gujarat Government is bent on not allowing the Yatra to lodge even a democratic protest. But despite all provocation, the protest will be peaceful."

Meanwhile, the ranks of the Narmada Samarpit Dal swelled to over 60, with the induction of more persons on the way.

In another event, representatives of tribals from all over India, braving a cold wave in Northern India, began a dharna near Rashtrapati Bhavan (in New Delhi). Yesterday, they submitted a memorandum to President R. Venkataraman. During the discussions with the President, it is learnt that the President has desired lowering of the height of the dam. The former Union Minister for Social Welfare, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan urged the government to reconsider and review Sardar Sarovar Project.

On the Gujarat side, the State Government and the Chamber of Commerce deployed thousands of police and more than 500 luxury buses were mobilised to bring in about 30,000 people to attend the Narmada Samarthan Rally. The speeches made including that of the Chief Minister, Mr. Chimanbhai Patel, were vengeful and abusive on the Sangharsh Yatra leaders. Rumours were being spread that Swami Agnivesh had gone underground, while it was a fact that he is in Delhi for the tribal rally there. Gujarat State Cooperative Federation has openly advertised misinformation against the anti-dam struggle in the print media in Gujarat.

However, it has been reported that people who participated in the sponsored rally at Ferkuwa in Gujarat yesterday, which was addressed by the Gujarat Chief Minister, have left for their homes despite promises that they would stay behind.

# Marchers set to enter Gujarat

UNDETTERED by the rumblings of the juggernaut that was set rolling by the Gujarat government on Saturday, over 7,000 anti-Narmada dam marchers inched their way towards the Gujarat border in a determined attempt to halt the work on the multi-crore-rupee Sardar Sarovar Project.

Gun-totting policemen took positions along the 40-km-long border as Gujarat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel, the self-styled general of the Sardar Sarovar Sena, cried halt to the marchers from the pulpit of a massive rally held at Ferkuva, barely a kilometre away from the Madhya Pradesh border.

The rally, organised jointly by the Gujarat government and various voluntary, social and religious organisations, was intended to sound a warning to the marchers of the dire consequence they would face if they dared cross over the Gujarat border.

Ranvir Nayar in Alirajpur (MP) and Nachiketa Desai in Ferkuva (Gujarat)

An estimated 50,000 people were brought for the rally from different parts of the state in government vehicles, luxury buses and trucks of private contractors. Special pandals and tents were set up by charitable organisations where free food was provided to the pro-dam rallyists.

The rally, which was later to be converted into a chain to prevent the anti-Narmada dam marchers from entering Gujarat, dispersed by 5 pm, though the organisers wanted the participants to stay on for the next couple of days. The task of protecting the border was left solely to the police who stopped even the regular commuters from coming into Gujarat from the other side, causing total disruption of the traffic between the two states.

Even as speaker after speaker thundered at the Frekuva rally, calling names to eminent social worker Baba Amte and Narmada activist Medha Patkar in Alirajpur, about 30 km away, over 7,000 villagers, mostly half clad tribals, moved through the main streets chanting slogans and anti-dam songs.

The contrast between the pro-dam rallyists at Ferkuva and the anti-dam marchers collected at Alirajpur was striking. While the pro-dam rallyists displayed colourful linens, wore shoes and other footwears, the anti-dam marchers were mostly tribals who had walked bare-feet for 200 km in a hostile terrain, sleeping in the open, braving the cold.

There was lots of merrymaking among the pro-dam rallyists but no enthusiasm. The anti-dam villagers, on the other hand, were greeted with gulal by the people of Alirajpur when they entered the township on Saturday morning.

Street plays, corner meetings and posters had already set the mood at Alirajpur where anti-dam activists addressed a public meeting in the evening. Narration of woeful tales by the tribals who had refused to abandon their homes to make way for the gigantic reservoir of the Sardar Sarovar Project along with a sprinkling of folk songs and dances touched the hearts of the people of Alirajpur.

Reports of massive mobilisation of forces — police and otherwise — have caused concern to the anti-dam activists who have pledged to abide by non-violence. "We don't want a confrontation with the people of Gujarat. At the same time, we want to make them realise the plight of the tribals who would be uprooted by the Sardar Sarovar Project," said Medha Patkar.

Independent. 30 Dec '90

## Anti-dam activists fear police action

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI, Dec. 30.

MEMBERS of the Narmada Bachao Andolan have expressed serious concern over the recent developments reported from the borders of Gujarat. At a news conference here today, Mr Smitu Kothari, an activist who had returned from the "Sangharsh Yatra" to Sardar Sarovar, said the andolan members were wondering why the Gujarat government was mobilising a force to confront the peaceful "yatris" when they attempt to enter the state tomorrow.

Dr B. D. Sharma, the commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, who is also associated with the anti-Sardar Sarovar dam movement, said he had talked to the Gujarat chief minister, Mr Chimbanbhai Patel, this morning to presuade him to listen to the people.

Mr Patel reportedly told Dr Sharma that he was willing to talk to the people, but the work on the dam would go on. The "Sangharsha Yatra," undertaken by those who oppose the Sardar Sarovar project (SSP) and all mega dams, is scheduled to reach the SSP site tomorrow evening to attempt to stop all construction work and demand a complete and comprehensive review of the project by the government.

Dr Sharma had also wrote a letter to Mr Patel today in which he said entire families were marchng to the dam and any conflict with the police could prove dangerous. Dr Sharma also wrote to the Prime Minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar, yesterday and had talked to the president.

"We plan to remain peaceful," the andolan representatives in the Capital reiterated today. Those who have returned from the yatra to the Capital include Mr Dashrath Patil and Swami Agnivesh.

A PTI report from Chandpur in Jhabua district says that tribals from Maharashtra — mainly from the Sardar Sarovar project — affected areas of Dhule district, today joined the anti-Narmada Yatra as it reached Chandpur, close to the M.P.-Gujarat border, during the course of its journey to the Narmada dam site.

Hundreds of tribals from Akrani and Akkalkuva villages walked over 200 kms in the hilly tracts of Satpuda. The tribals changed their routes several times to escape the police posts set up by the Gujarat police on the M.P.-Gujarat border.

Addressing a rally of tribals at Alirajpur last night, the andolan leader Medha Patkar, said the Gujarat government was bent upon not allowing the tribals to lodge a democratic protest.

Times of India
31st Dec, 90

e police confront anti-dam activists

# Narmada march headline towards showdown

DINKAR PANDYA

AHMEDABAD, DEC 30
THE will of the people of Gujarat to go ahead with the Narmada project was forcefully demonstrated at a massive rally, attended by over a lakh people, at the border village of Ferkuva yesterday, even as Baba amte threatened , to form "dive and die" squads to stop the project.

Baba Amte gave this call at Alirajpur, a town in Madhya Pradesh about 30 km away from Gujarat border while leading the "sanghursh yatra", against the Sardar Sarover project, to the dam site.

The massive rally, organised jointly by the state government and various voluntary, social and religious organisations, resolved to form a human chain at the border to prevent the marchers from entering the state. The rally was addressed by chief minister Chimanbhai Patel, former chief minister and Cong leader Amarsinh Chaudhary, BJP leader and leader of the opposition in the state Keshubhai Patel, Adivasi leader Harivallabh Parikh, former ministers Sanat Mehta, state Janata Dal president Narpatsinh Chavda and religious leader Swami Sachhidanand.

The speakers at the rally lashed out at the anti-Narmada activists, charging that they were thwarting the progress of Gujarat and also of the country. In the name of environment, some of the elements who had financial backing from foreign countries, were playing the game of these nations to keep India in a state of backwardness.

Expressing the state government's resolve, chief minister Chimanbhai Patel declared that there would be no compromise on construction of the dam or on the question of lowering its height or even reviewing the entire project in any way.

However, Mr Patel offered to talk with anyone on the issues of rehabilitation, afforestation or environmental protection, despite the fact that " no where in the world has such detailed and liberal envirnmental and rehabilitation programmes been worked out".

Mounting frontal attack on the anti-Narmada lobbyist, particularly against Baba Amte, he said that it would sin to call him either a baba or a saint. The chief minister asked, "why had he kept quiet when hunderds of dams, large and small, were being built throughout the country? Is it because Baba Amte cannot see Gujarat making progress?"

Meanwhile, Baba Amte and Medha Patkar declared that they were for the stoppage of the work on the dam and the review of the entire project.

Talking to newsmen at Alirajpur, where the anti-Narmada marchers were halting, they declared that the Sardar Sarovar project had become a symbol of the lopsided development policies adopted in the country.

Baba Amte declared that he would continue his journey towards the dam site in Gujarat despite all the hurdles put up by the Gujarat government.

The "Narmada bachao andolan" rally led by these two leaders is likely to reach Gujarat border either by Sunday night or by Monday morning. For obvious reasons, the anti-Narmada leaders have continuously changed their schedule on their entry into Gujarat. First it had been declared that they would cross the border on December 31, which was later changed to December 29, and now it is again on Monday, December 31, they are likely to cross the border.

Though people of Gujarat are preparing to form a human chain to prevent the Baba and his supporters, police has virtually sealed the state border with Madhya Pradesh to avoid any unwanted incident between the two hostile camps. □

# Narmada marchers beaten up

A 2,000-strong contingent of armed policemen took charge of the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border outpost yesterday even as the anti-Narmada dam marchers were all set to enter Gujarat today.

Unprovoked by the sabre-rattling exercise enacted here by Gujarat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel on Saturday, over 1,000 anti-dam satyagrahis set up camps on the banks of a rivulet at Chandpur village, about 2 km from the border checkpost.

As the yatra entered its sixth day, hectic activity was seen on both sides with Gujarat police sealing off the border. The yatra continued from Alirajpur and covered 14 km by afternoon and stopped at Chandpur.

The marchers were enthusiastic about the likely scenario on Monday. "We are willing to brave both lathis and bullets, but we will enter Gujarat at any cost," said a Vilali tribal from Maharastra.

**Nachiketa Desai** in Ferkuva and
**Ranvir Nayar** in Alirajpur

On the other side, the Gujarat government was flexing its muscles. However, there was a visible softening of attitude by the chief minister who asked the people to stay calm.

The panic was visible on the Gujarat side as the marchers, accompanied by eminent social worker Baba Amte and activist Medha Patkar, set off from Alirajpur on the last leg of their trek.

Gujarat director-general of police B S Narula himself undertook a reconnaissance mission even as mounted policemen galloped around the main road and in fields sending villagers helter-skelter.

A mob of about 300 youths roughed up people who had come from the Madhya Pradesh side and hurled vulgar epithets. They did not even spare newsmen who ventured to enter Gujarat.

The youths were led by one Hasmukh Amin who identified himself as the brother of Gujarat urban development minister Narhari Amin, a close confidant of Chimanbhai Patel.

Intelligence and civil officials were sent to the satyagrahis' camps disguised as journalists to find out the marchers' plans even as the Gujarat government contemplated police action.

The chief minister's call to the people of Gujarat to organise a human chain to halt the marchers found no buyers. Even months of efforts by a dozen-odd voluntary organisations and several chambers of commerce which raised Rs 3 crore for the counter-satyagraha came a cropper.

The anti-dam activists, on the other hand, won the first round by evoking mass sympathy for their cause among the tribals hailing from the border villages of Madhya Pradesh. This became obvious when over 4,000 tribals joined the marchers from Alirajpur, a day before the D-day.

The 20,000-strong government-sponsored rally, addressed by the chief minister on Saturday, having dispersed the venue, seemed like a war front on Sunday with scores of tents pitched up for about 2,000 armed policemen.

The state authorities said the pro-dam activists would not be placed at least within 1.5 km from the border to stop the marchers as prohibitory orders were in force in that area. A senior police officer however said, "We will bash them up properly if they enter our state."

Meanwhile, the state government turned down a request from the police to declare Baba Amte, Medha Patkar and eight others of the Narmada Bachao Andolan as persona non grata.

Patkar said the Andolan would finalise its strategy this morning.

Independent. 31 Dec, '90

# Narmada dam site turns into a citadel

Indian Express
31 Dec, 90

**Express News Service**

KEVADIA (Bharuch), Dec. 30.

Sardar Sarovar dam project area has turned into an impregnable citadel for any outside element to encroach inside the dam area, said Mr. Prem Kumar Taneja, Broach district collector, at Kevadia on Saturday night.

Talking to a team of newsmen from Broach city, Mr. Taneja said that all the strategic loop-points have been plugged with a strong security points. Besides the people from all corners of the State have thronged round the dam site making a human chain.

A strong bandobast to prevent any attempt to stop the continuous working of the construction of dam is assured. Law and order machinery is on a stand to in all directions sealing the total area.

Though there was no announcement of any anti-dam programme from Baba Amte and his associates, no chance is taken in view of his loud proclamation to stake his life to stop dam work to save and preserve what he considered the environment.

Moreover, Mr. Taneja said people have come in a big number to fortify total dam area to resist whatever attempt by Baba Amte, peacefully yet firmly, their resistence will remain non-violent through, the administration is prepared to meet any eventuality in case 'intruders' take recourse to violence.

The district police superintendent Anup Kumar Singh told newspersons that possible entry points at Vagadia, Thavadia, Bhomalia and Mokhadi villages, the camps are set up by the people who have become an invincible wall round the dam site. People of Wadgam have also joined the crusade, Mr. Singh said.

Newspersons watched the youths men, women and aged villagers raising pro-Narmada slogans. They exhibited the spirit of sacrificing their life to protect Narmada at any cost. They have themself become barricades on all roads leading to Narmada dam.

Broach district Kisan Sangathan leaders Mangalbhai Patel, Labhshankar Upadhyay and Bhailal Patel told newspersons earlier at Rajpipla that if needed over one lakh more farmers were ready on their toes to start towards Kevadia in their respective villages.

More and more people are decending in the area as if it was a major pilgrimage place.

Women's organisations from district have come to prepare food packets for the volunteers. Mr. Chandrakant Amin, eminent worker of GNFC, was also at the site.

Meanwhile, resident deputy collector has declared ban on holding or moving with lethal weapons, explosive missiles etc. till Tuesday.

CHANDPUR, (Jhabua) (PTI): Tribals, from Maharashtra, mainly from the Sardar Sarovar project affected areas of Dhule district, today joined the anti-Narmada yatra as it reached Chandpur, close to the M.P.-Gujarat border, during the course of its journey to the Narmada Dam site.

Hundreds of tribals from Akrani and Akkalkuva villages walked over 200 km in the hilly tracts of Satpuda. The tribals changed their routes several times to escape police posts set up by the Gujarat police on the MP-Gujarat border.

Addressing a rally of tribals at Alirajpur last night, andolan leader Medha Patkar said the Gujarat Government has bent upon not allowing the tribals even to lodge a democratic projects.

Andolan leaders from various parts of the country also addressed the tribals.

Meanwhile, an andolan spokesman said in a statement, that Swami Agnivesh was in Delhi.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN AND SAHAYOG
C/o B-5 M.S. Flats,
Baba Kharag Singh Marg,
New Delhi.
31 December 1990.

PRESS RELEASE

400 representatives of tribal organisations from all over the country met the Prime Minister, Shri Chandra Shekhar, at his residence this morning. They collectively raised the concern regarding the impending confrontation in the Narmada Valley caused by the Gujarat Chief Minister, Shri Chimanbhai Patel, who has attempted to create a human wall comprising of police barricades and thousands of mobilised people. Attention was also drawn to the demands of the Sangharsh Yatra in which affected people of the three States of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh and representatives of organisations from all over the country are participating. This Yatra is currently at the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border where it has been stopped by the police barricades.

The Prime Minister was also appraised of the fact that for almost a year all the efforts by the Narmada Bachao Andolan to secure a dialogue with the Gujarat and the Central Government have yielded no response. It may be recalled that the ex-Prime Minister, Shri V.P. Singh had in May assured the Andolan that a dialogue would be initiated as soon as possible. Detailed letters outlining the impending negative social, economic and environmental consequences of the Sardar Sarovar Project have also been presented to the Prime Minister, the Chief Minister of Gujarat and the President of India.

The basic issues which have been raised in these representations relate to the right to life of the people particularly of the members of Scheduled Tribes who comprise the most vulnerable sections of our community. The responsibility for protecting their interests and advancing their welfare has been cast on the Union Government and the Governors as its representatives. It is in this context that the attention of the President was drawn to the unfortunate situation where a reign of terror has been created by the Gujarat administration and the people have been denied their rightful protection. The powers of the Central Government under Article 339 of the Constitution should be invoked in this situation because the ultimate responsibility for the protection of the tribal people under the Constitution rests with the Government of India. The President expressed his sympathy for the cause and suggested that the matter should be taken up with the Prime Minister. He also had promised to speak to him.

The Prime Minister appreciated the problems faced by the people. On the Narmada issue he assured them that he would speak to the Chief Minister regarding the need to avoid a confrontation. He also stated that he would speak to the Chief Minister regarding the modalities of initiating a dialogue with representatives of the affected people.

In view of the emerging situation of tension involving basic human concerns on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border, an observer team on behalf of members of Parliament and the tribal organisations left for Gujarat this evening for an on-the-spot enquiry.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Ferkuwa, M.P.-Gujarat border.
PRESS NOTE
January 1, 1991.

The new year dawned on the over six thousand adivasis, farmers and activists after one of the coldest nights of the year. As people must have revelled in five star hotels to bring in the new year, the Sangharsh Yatris, undeterred, spent their seventh night at the border in open fields with a renewed resolve to fulfill their objective of reaching the dam site.

Today, people are continuing their 40-hour dharna announced yesterday to seek a dialogue with the people of Gujarat and the government. However, the nature of reporting by the Gujarat press on yesterday's events has dismayed the 'andolankartas' by its distortion and falsehood, raising doubts about yesterday's promise by the Gujarat people to engage in a dialogue at the end of the dharna at 10 a.m. tomorrow (2nd Jan.)

The nature of activities across the border also seem to suggest that the Gujarat government is keen on instigating a clash between the people of the two states. Whereas the andolankartas are prepared to face the consequences of breaking section 144 restrictions and the massive police force, they are still restrained and seeking a way out from a direct clash with the people.

The Gujarat police also seem to be getting frustrated, and, without anyone to beat, they looted the fields of a farmer on the M.P. border of his standing crop of chana. The farmer came to complain to us and we have reported the matter to the Chandrapur police. It is a portent of the itch of the Gujarat police perhaps for getting their guns, lathis and hands working on the poor adivasis and farmers of the Yatra.

An observers' delegation of six persons, headed by the Member of Parliament P.S. Turkey, visited the site today to assess the situation. They found the Gujarat side teeming with thousands of policemen and heavy governmental bandobast that included five shamianas filled with comfortable 'gaddis', pillows, however totally empty. On being queried by the delegation, the Baroda Collector reportedly accepted that all such arrangements, including the transport of people from and to the site was being arranged by the government and also funded by it.

On the seventh day of the Yatra, the people are steadfast and continue to be resolved to fulfill their objective of expressing their anger on the anti-people developmental policies in the country through the symbolic action of reaching the dam site. Unlike the government sponsored 'commuting' group on the other side, the andolankartas are prepared to fight on throughout the entire cold winter, if required.

# Go back, Amte told

By SHAILESH PANDYA
The Times of India News Service

FERKUVA (Baroda District), December 31.

THOUSANDS of pro-Narmada activists continued to range against Baba Amte's group across the Ferkuva bridge here today, though he was allowed to address them at this border village, about 150 kms from Baroda.

In the meantime, Baba Amte's group continued to stage a sit-in here and is yet to finalise its programme.

The huge pro-Narmada crowd, hardly 200 feet away from Baba Amte and his group, have resolved to offer a peaceful satyagraha till Baba Amte returned to camp.

both the groups are ready for a showdown and the authorities have managed to avoid a confrontation between them.

Tension prevailed with the Baba entering the Gujarat border from Chandpur in Madhya Pradesh this morning. He wanted to address the pro-Narmada rallyists on the other side of the bridge.

When he reached the barricade after a short walk, the district

▶ See Edit: Lift Ban
On Protest, Page 12

authorities allegedly prevented him and his supporters from proceeding although he said he wanted to present his case before them.

However, he was told that it was not advisable to address them as the mood of the pro-Narmada rallyists might create a law and order problem.

The Baba continued to plead his case, saying he has "affection and love for the people of Gujarat and he would plead his case before them with tears in his eyes".

However, the pro-Narmada activists greeted the arrival of Baba Amte and his group with shouts and slogans telling him to go back. They sang bhajans and songs conveying to the Baba and his group that they would not allow the stoppage of the Narmada dam construction.

Mrs Urmilaben Patel, the wife of the chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, the Gujarat Panchayat and forest minister, Mr Naransinh Rathwa, several other VIPs and thousands of pro-Narmada rallyists squatted on either side of the bridge with a firm resolve to prevent the entry of Baba Amte and his group.

The large number of women sang bhajans and songs criticising Baba Amte for his role on this issue and urging him to concentrate on the more burning problems of the country.

When the collector refused to allow the Baba to address the pro-Narmada rally, he went back to his ambulance, insisting that he would sit there till he was allowed to address them.

The Baba said he would die for the cause and would not budge on the issue. The pro-Narmada activists continued to raise their voices telling the Baba to go back.

They said the Narmada was their lifeline and they would not allow anybody to interfere with it. The Baba then consulted his aides about how to cope with the unexpected situation.

The Baba said he had not brought a microphone with him, or he would have addressed them. The tension escalated with both sides remaining adamant. This situation continued for several hours.

TOINS reports from New Delhi that the Prime Minister Mr Chandra Shekhar, today assured some representatives of the anti-Sardar Sarovar dam project that he would pursuade the Gujarat chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, to initiate a dialogue with the people affected by the project. He, however, refused to review the project at this stage.

This was disclosed at a press conference today by Dr B. D. Sharma, the commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and Mr Smitu Kothari, an activist of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

They said Mr Shekhar also assured the representatives that he would persuade Mr Patel not to take recourse to any sort of confrontation with the anti-Sarovar project activists.

Mr Patel had announced last week that he would build a human wall by mobilising over 100,000 people along the Gujarat-MP border so that the Narmada Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra activists were unable to reach the dam, they alleged.

They said the Sangharash Yatra, which started on December 25 from Vidvani in MP, had been stopped at the MP-Gujarat border by a large police force posted by the chief minister. The latter, they said, had spread the rumour that the Sangharsh Yatra activists would destroy the dam.

Times of India
1 Jan. 91

# Tension as Amte enters Gujarat

Ranvir Nayar
in Ferkuva

THE ANTI-NARMADA dam marchers postponed their entry into Gujarat and began a 40-hour dharna here yesterday, preparing for a major confrontation.

A pro-dam demonstration was averted following intervention from the prime minister's office (PMO). The Gujarat government softened its stand, apparently after a telephone call from the PMO to chief minister Chimanbhai Patel to allow eminent social worker Baba Amte to enter Gujarat and address supporters of the Sardar Sarvodar Project (SSP).

Amte appealed for a "people to people" dialogue on the cause and benefit of the SSP which was turned down by the pro-dam demonstrators on the ground that the atmosphere was not conducive for such an exercise.

Tension had started building up since early Monday morning when over 10,000 anti-dam marchers left Chandpur, their last stop in Madhya Pradesh, to reach the heavily-barricaded Gujarat border barely 4 Kms away.

The Gujarat police had created a no-man's land extending upto 1.5 Kms from the border keeping at bay a 2,000-strong crowd brought by the government, religious and commercial organisations.

PTI reports: Baba Amte, who arrived from Chandpur in Madhya Pradesh on the last lap of the anti-Narmada march, stayed here, persisting he would not leave the place until he met the pro-Narmada activists directly.

The pro-Narmada activists, who greeted Baba Amte with jeers and raised slogans against him, were squatting on the Bhordha river bridge.

Independent
1 Jan, 91

# Anti-dam activists' 40-hour satyagraha

**FERKUVA (Baroda), Dec. 31:** A day of high drama on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border ended with anti-Narmada activists announcing a 40-hour satyagraha to give time to the Gujarat authorities to initiate dialogue on the Sardar Sarovar issue and the social worker, Baba Amte, who was taunted when he crossed the border to address the supporters of the dam, issuing an emotional address to the people of Gujarat to realise the plight of people living in the valley.

About five thousand tribals and anti-Narmada activists, who had started their march from Barwani in Madhya Pradesh on Christmas, arrived at the border this morning but refrained from crossing over to Gujarat. Instead, they sent Baba Amte and a 10-man delegation across the border to initiate dialogue with representatives of the pro-dam supporters who had formed a "human chain" about 500 metres inside the border to prevent the entry of marchers.

Tension mounted on either side as Baba Amte, who remained in his specially designed bus, was greeted with slogans like "Amte, go back" by the pro-Narmada supporters who turned out in large numbers. After Amte arrived inside the border, where prohibitory orders had been imposed by the Gujarat government, the issue seemed deadlocked as he was not allowed by the authorities to reach near the 'human chain'. But after almost five hours wait, he prevailed on the administration to allow him to greet the people of Gujarat a happy new year and not to be apprehensive about the intentions of oustees from the valley.

The stalemate, however, remained even at the end of the day as the Sardar Sarovar supporters could not give a fixed time-frame within which the dialogue would be held on the Narmada issue. The anti-Narmada activists, at a core group meeting held after Baba Amte addressed the 'human chain' decided to launch a 40-hour satyagraha from 4.30 p.m. and wait till 8.30 a.m. on Wednesday for a response from the government and pro-Narmada groups.

Collector of Baroda district Tapan Ray conducted hectic parleys with Amte and the supporters of the dam managed to defuse the tension by letting the tempers, which were quite frayed in the morning, to cool down by evening. Things reached quite a flash point when Baba Amte refused to accept food sent to him and his delegation by the dam supporters. He insisted that he would have food only if he was allowed to sit with the people of Gujarat rather than being given food in his bus. "This is not the hospitality that I expected from the people of Gujarat" he said.

Later in a brief seven-minute speech to the dam supporters, he said: "I am hungry and thirsty not for food and water but for the love and affection of the people of Gujarat". He said when he first visited Kutch and Saurashtra several years ago, he had strongly supported the plan for bringing the Narmada water to these regions. "But it is the brute hunger for size that is reflected in the Sardar Sarovar dam that I am opposed to. There are other ways of taking Narmada water to the thirst lands of Kutch and Saurashtra".

He said the dam idea should be reviewed because it was also a case of a "fight between greed and need". He said even Mahatma Gandhi would have agreed with the point of view of the people living in the valley whose lands were to be submerged. "I have come here to you to show my plight and not to fight with you", he said in an emotion choked voice.

There was, however, no response from the dam supporters when Amte put forth a proposal stating that the people for and against the Sardar Sarovar project could start a dialogue to thrash out the issues. No minister or important politician was present at the spot to represent on behalf of the government or the dam supporters. Suren Chokse, the president of Central Gujarat Chamber of Commerce, told Baba Amte: "We have listened to your proposal and accepted your New Year greetings, now I feel you should go back and let the right kind of atmosphere to be created for talks".

When Baba Amte insisted that a time-frame and the modalities for the proposed talks be decided on the spot, Chokse told him: "Our people are in a very nasty mood today. You must go back and wait for our response to your proposal".

A meeting of the anti-Narmada activists was held immediately after Baba Amte's address to the dam supporters. The meeting attended, among others, by Ms. Medha Patkar and Mr. Ashish Kothari observed that there had not been any positive response from the other side. "We have still decided to give them the benefit of doubt and wait for 40 hours before taking any action", Ms. Patkar said.

While the dam supporters and the Gujarat government were seemingly willing to hold talks with Baba Amte, they were not reorganising the Narmada Bachao Andolan which was spearheading the agitation. She said, "This is gross insult to a people's movement".

The anti-Narmada activists said they would announce their future course of action at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, before commencing the march from Chandpur to the Gujarat border this morning. Baba Amte clarified to newsmen that the marchers had no intention to damage the Sardar Sarovar dam. While the Gujarat government had agreed only to discuss the implementation of the rehabilitation scheme and afforestation plans, the Andolan wanted a complete review of the project.

The marchers arrived at the Gujarat border covering the three kilometre distance in about 45 minutes.

Ms. Patkar told the marchers it was unfortunate that the people of Gujarat had been led to believe that the movement was directed against the state. "How can we be against Gujarat when the project itself is sponsored by four states", she said. The government had tried to avoid a dialogue on the subject all these years and this was the reason why the people from the valley had to march to Gujarat to put across their point of view, she said.

Indian Express 1 Jan, 91

# Gujaratis determined to build Narmada dam, block Baba Amte

From Yubaraj Ghimire

Baroda, Dec. 31: "*Chahe duba Suraj, Chand, bund banke rahega* (The Sun and Moon may set but the dam will be constructed at any cost)", has now become the slogan of almost entire Gujarat even as a few committed anti-Narmada propagandists led by the Magsaysay award winner, Baba Amte, are planning a stiff resistance.

The Gujarat government of Mr Chimanbhai Patel, which is solidly backed by all the Opposition parties in the state, has already given a call to the people to stop Baba Amte and his followers from entering Gujarat to stall the dam construction.

A determined Baba Amte, who had last week retracted his reported threat of taking "jal samadhi" (drowning himmself) if the Gujarat government went ahead with the Narmada Sagar project, came out with a modified threat that he would form "suicide squads" which will "dive (into the river) and die" to lodge their protest against construction of the dam. The threat came after the chief minister's call to stall Baba Amte's proposed march.

[But a small band of environmentalists, led by Baba Amte, staged a sitin here after crossing the Gujarat border. Baba Amte insisted that he would not leave the place until he met the pro-Narmada activists directly.

[The thousands of pro-Narmada activists, who greeted Baba Amte with jeers and raised slogans against him, were squatting on the Bhordha river bridge, only a few feet away, asking him to "go back." But Baba Amte said, "I will not go back until I meet the people of Gujarat to present my case," reports PTI]

**All-party rally:** The first all-arty rally to involve the people against the anti-dam move was organised at Ferukva, 160 km from here, on Saturday. It ended with the crowd yelling that no matter whatever step Baba Amte took," we will ensure that the dam is constructed". About 200 buses of the state transport corporation were used by the administration to take people to the Ferukva rally in order to show that they were totally involved in the movement for the project.

The chief minister announced on the occasion that he had a detailed discussion with the Prime Minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar, who had assured him that there was no move to reconsider or review the project.

The project is to be completed by 2,000 AD if everything goes right. The Planning Commission had cleared the projec last year.

The project envisatges harnessing the Narmada for providing drinking and irrigation water to Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra in addition to power generation.

The scheme will also substantially lower the flood damage every year. Mr Patel announced that the project would be completed on schedule.

The multipurpose joint venture of these states also envisages construction of a major dam on the Narmada in Gujarat which Baba Amte has been opposing.

The World Bank has extended a credit of $450 millions for the dam and its hydel power and canal network.

Gujarat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel addressing a pro—Narmada rally at Ferkuva in Gujarat on Sunday. PTI

Gujarat appears so committed to the project that even the noted Gandhian, Chunni Bhai, said at the December 29 rally that the state should go ahead with the dam even if Baba Amte took an extreme step.

But the chief minister was more sober in his reaction and hoped that Baba Amte would give up the protest.

"As a friend, he has suggested that the project be shelved but his suggestions are not binding on us. I am even prepared to rehabilitate all the displaced from Madhya Pradesh giving them much more than what they are going to lose," Mr Patel said. The crowd roared, "*Baba Amte pachhe jao, pachhe jao*" (Baba Amte go back, go back."

Telegraph 1 Jan, 91

Independent 1 Jan 91

# Shekhar to ask Chiman to talk to tribals

PRIME MINISTER Chandrashekhar yesterday assured representatives of tribal organisations that he would speak to Gujarat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel to avoid a confrontation with anti-Narmada dam marchers.

He said he would ask Patel to open a dialogue with representatives of the people to be displaced by the project.

The prime minister said he appreciated the distress that would be caused to those who would be dispalced, mostly tribals, according to Dr B D Sharma, commissioner for scheduled castes and tribes and Smita Kothari of the Naramada Bachao Andolan, who were among those of the delegation that met him.

The prime minister's assurance comes in the light of the remark made by president R Venkataraman that a dialogue should be established with the effected people and the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam reduced, if necessary, to lessen its impact on the life of the tribals.

Tension has been building up on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border with marchers deciding to offer satyagraha against the construction of the dam and the Gujarat chief minister ordering police not to let any of them into the state.

The Gujarat government has refused to hold any discussions with the anti-dam activists, dismissing their concern for tribals and the environment.

Four hundred representatives of tribal organisations from all over the country met the prime minister at his residence and collectively voiced their concern over the atmosphere of confrontation in the Narmada valley caused by the Gujarat chief minister who has attempted to create a human wall comprising of police barricades and thousands of mobilised people.

Attention was also drawn to the demands of the Sangharsh Yatra in which affected people of the three states of Gujarat, Maharasthra and Madhya Pradesh and representatives of orgnaisations from all over the country are participating.

The yatra is currently at the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border where the marchers have been stopped by police barricades.

Dr Sharma said the prime minister was also apprised of the fact that for almost a year all the efforts by the Narmada Bachao Andolan to secure a dialogue with the Gujarat and the central governments had not yielded any response.

It may be recalled that former prime minister V P Singh had, in May last year, assured the Andolan that a dialogue would be initiated as soon as possible. Detailed letters outlining the impending negative social, economic and environmental consequences of the Sardar Sarovar Project were presented to the prime minister, the Gujarat chief minister and the president.

The basic issues which have been raised in these represantations relate to the right to life of the people, particularly of the members of scheduled tribes who comprise the most vulnerable sections of our society.

The responsibility for protecting their interests and advancing their welfare has been cast on the union government and the governors as its representatives.

It is in this context that the attention of the president was drawn to the situation where a reign of terror has been created by the Gujarat administration and the people have been denied their rightful protection, Dr Sharma said.

The powers of the central government under article 339 of the constitution should be invoked in this situation because the ultimate responsiblity for the protection of the tribal people under the consititution rests with the government.

Our Special Correspondent
in New Delhi

# Observers at dam dharna site

CHANDPUR (Jhabua District), Jan. 1 (PTI).

A SIX-MEMBER observers' team of the Central government's schedule castes and tribes commission arrived at the site of the dharna by the anti-narmada activists, about three km from here, in Madhya Pradesh, to defuse the situation in the wake of the threat of confrontation with the pro-dam agitators.

The team, led by Mr Piyush Tirki, MP, from West Bengal met the anti-dam marchers led by the social activists, Baba Amte and Ms Medha Patkar, who are staging a dharna on the inter-state border to protest against the Gujarat government refusing to allow them to continue their march to the site of the Sardar Sarovar project.

The team, comprising Dr Vinayan, a social activist from Bihar, Swami Muktanand, Mr Lalshanker Parghi, Baba Pansare and Mr Satya, had been deputed by the schedule castes and tribes commission chairman, Mr B. D. Sharma and the Prime Minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar, to prevent confrontation between the pro and anti-Narmada activists.

The team would also meet the pro-dam agitators on the other side of the border. It will submit a report to the chairman of the commission and the Prime Minister in Delhi tomorrow.

Tension continued to prevail on the inter-state border with pro-dam agitators on the Gujarat side raising slogans against the march of the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the anti-dam activists.

The crowd on the Gujarat side squatted on the Bhradi river bridge, blocking traffic from Gujarat and used microphones to ask the tribal followers of Baba Amte and Ms Medha Patkar, to go back.

The anti-dam marchers sang tribal songs, demanding their right to life.

A field on the MP side of the border was virtually converted into a tribal village, where groups from different areas cooked their own food.

The Swaminarayan sect volunteers served food to the pro-dam agitators.

Police forces from both the states kept strict vigil in their areas.

The anti-dam tribals collected firewood from the nearby forest and cooked their traditional 'dal bati' from the rations they were carrying along.

With the mercury dropping below three degrees last night, some voluntary organisations from Alirajpur rushed blankets for the tribals, who have been sleeping in the open fields.

But the tribals refused them saying "we are used to the mist and fog". They were seen "comfortably" stretched in an open field and fighting the cold wave by burning firewood.

Times of India 2 Jan, 91

# Chiman woos plan panel on Narmada

MK Venu in New Delhi

FACED WITH the prospect of a confrontation with Baba Amte over the Sardar Sarovar project, Gujrat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel has begun lobbying with the new planning commission deputy chairman Mohan Dharia to press for the "speedy execution of the project.

Interestingly, Patel is going ahead with his efforts to thwart Baba Amte despite prime minister Chandrashekhar's call for a peaceful dialogue between the Gujarat government and those who are opposing the project.

Patel, at his meeting with Dharia, stressed that "apart from irrigation facilities to 18 lakh hectares, the project is to be depended on for providing drinking water facilities to seven thousand villages which have no assured source of drinking water."

Independent 2 Jan. 91.

Patel's case for drinking water becomes particularly strong in the context of the assurance given by the prime minister to the Rajasthan government that "drinking water was a priority problem and will be speedily implemented."

The Gujarat chief minister also urged the speedy clearance of the gas-based power projects in the state which "are crucial to the state which is far away from the coalfields."

The planning commission has meanwhile fixed Gujarat's annual plan outlay for 1991-92 at Rs 1750 crore.

Dharia is believed to have concurred with the chief minister on his priorities in the context of the probelms faced by Gujarat.

# Sarovar work will continue, says Chiman

GANDHINAGAR, Jan. 2

GUJARAT Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel today said work on the Sardar Sarovar dam project near Baroda would not be stopped even for a single day.

Talking to reporters here, Patel said the Rs.6,000-crore project was undertaken after a lot of scrutiny. "But some environmentalists are opposing it in the name of tribals' welfare', he said adding they should consider the drinking water problem faced by the people before opposing the project.

Patel said there was no confrontation betv en the pro and anti-Narmada groups on the Gujarat-MP border near Baroda.

The government had not arrested supporters of Baba Amte and did not intend to arrest them, he added.

**INDORE; About 20 volunteers of the Jan Vikas Sangharsha Yatra, now staging dharna at the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat boarder near Chandpur village in Jhabua district, tried to enter Gujarat today but were sent back by the pro-Narmada project activists demonstrating near Farekuva village in Gujarat.**

According to police control here, the situation was peaceful and anti-Narmada project activists numbering around 5,000 were continuing their efforts to enter Gujarat to reach the site of the Sardar Sarovar project near Kevadia.

**Meanwhile, the Bombay Naturalist Society, in a telegram to Chimanbhai Patel, protested against the treatment meted out to the participants of the anti-Narmada project march and called for immediate dialogue with them.**

The society is sending a two-member delegation to the site for the dharna to express solidarity with the anti-Narmada project activists.

**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar has assured representatives of tribal organisations that the response of state governments regarding the rehabilitation schemes connected with the Sardar Sarovar project will be made known within a month.

A 10-member delegation of the tribal representatives apprised the prime minister last evening of various social, ecological, economic and rehabilitation problems arising out of the megaproject.

Representatives and six members of an "observer team" which visited the Narmada Valley described the situation as "tense". The observers included Piyush Tikri, MP.

Piyush Tikri said some 5,000 people had gathered on the border and planned to march to the site of the dam in Gujarat in a peaceful manner. "But the Gujarat government has issued prohibitory orders. Obviously this will lead to escalation of tension, misunderstanding and confrontation", he said.

Meanwhile, inhabitants and tribals of the Narmada Valley have also sought the personal intervention of the president to stop construction on the project and direct state governments to initiate a dialogue with the people. — PTI

# Anti-dam activists stage sit-in

By SHAILESH PANDYA
The Times of India News Service

FERKUVA (Baroda), Jan. 2.

ABOUT 15 anti-Narmada activists tied their hands and staged a sit-in after pro-Narmada rallyists refused to allow them to cross the Gujarat border and go to the Sardar Sarovar project site at Kevadia to halt construction work on the multi-purpose dam.

The anti-Narmada activists have been prevented from crossing the Gujarat border and the pro-Narmada rallyists who have been squatting there said they (anti-Narmada activists) could do so only at the cost of their lives.

With the expiry of the 40-hour deadline, the anti-Narmada activists decided to make an atempt to cross the Gujarat border in batches.

They suggested that the pro-Narmada activists allow the women to cross the border in batches and offer satyagraha whch was refused by pro-Narmada rallyists.

Ms Urmilaben Patel, president of the women action's group and wife of the Gujarat chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, said that under no circumstances would they be allowed to enter as the women of Gujarat are convinced about the utility of the project and "even if god opposed the project, he would not be allowed to enter", she said.

**PTI adds:** The Prime Minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar, has assured representatives of tribal organisations that the response of state governments regarding the rehabilitation schemes connected with the Sardar Sarovar project in the Narmada valley will be made known within a month.

Meanwhile, the Bombay naturalist society, in a telegram to the Gujarat chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, protested against the treatment meted out to the participants of the anti-Narmada project march and called for immediate dialogue with them.

The society is sending a two-member delegation to the site for the dharna to express solidarity with the anti-Narmada project activists.

**Chandigarh:** Mr Patel today said work on the Sardar Sarovar dam project near Baroda would not be stopped even for a single day.

Talking to reporters here, Mr Patel said the Rs 6,000-crore project was undertaken after a lot of scrutiny. "But some environmentalists are opposing it in the name of tribals' welfare," he said, adding that they should consider the drinking water problem faced by the people of Gujarat before opposing the ...

Times of India 3 Jan, 91

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR SCHEDULED CASTES & SCHEDULED TRIBES

## PRESS NOTE

3/1/91

The continuing confrontation on the border of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat on the issue of Sardar Sarovar Project has been a matter of deep concern to the Commissioner for SC & ST since it involves basic issues concerning constitutional safeguards, human rights and Govt.'s responsibility for protecting the interests of the tribal people. The Observor Team sent by the Commission under the leadership of Shri Piyush Tirky, MP has revealed that the real confrontation is between the Jana Vikas Sangharsh Yatris and the State authorities. This is a regrettable situation.

The reports in the press show that the groups of Sangharsh Yatris who have been trying to enter Gujarat to assert their rights in a peaceful way with their mouths and hands tied, as a token of their peaceful intentions, have not only been stopped but even manhandled. The continued confrontation between the Yatris, most of whom are tribals, and the state authorities and the use of force against them is a clear violation of the Constitutional safeguards. The appeal by the Commissioner to the state authorities, the Governors and even the Prime Minister and the President has not made any material change in this situation. It is regretted that such violation should continue even as Parliament is in session.

In view of the grave situation, the Commissioner thought it necessary that the attention of the Parliament must be invited to the vital issues concerning the law, the Constitution, the human rights and also the responsibility of the State particularly in respect of a voiceless people whose interest is a trust with the nation. Since the matter concerning the promotion of the rule of law in the nation, the Commissioner has written to the Attorney General with a request that he may invite the attention of the Parliament. The Attorney General may address the people's representatives in favour of the rule of law since he has been entrusted a privileged status and position under the Constitution to draw the attention of the Government and the Parliament in matters of public importance in which the promotion of rule of law is the major concern. The Commissioner has urged the Attorney General not to fail the people in this hour of their need.

for Commissioner for SCs&STs

SARDAR SAROVAR PROJECT

# 'State misinforming people'

Eloa St

3/1/91

**By a Staff Reporter**

If there was a confrontation on the Sardar Sarovar Project at the Gujarat border it would be between the State police force of Gujarat and the tribal agitators, and not between the people of Gujarat and the agitationists as had been made out, asserted a team of observers on Wednesday in New Delhi.

The six-member team had gone on Monday to the border areas where the agitationists are staying put at the moment, to assess the situation on behalf of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Dr B. D. Sharma. The team included Mr Piyush Tirki, MP from West Bengal, Dr Vinayan, a social activist from Bihar, and four tribal representatives. On coming back to Delhi on Wednesday, they observed that the people-to-people fight was a misinformation campaign by the Gujarat Government. People on the other side of the border (Gujarat) were nowhere in picture. Some villagers noted that they were not against the anti-dam agitationists but, confused with all the police arrangements and imposition of Section 144 on the border.

Mr Tirki said when after a long discussion and persuasion the team was allowed into the Gujarat area, and looked for the local people, it was found that up to two km of area all that they met were some police personnel (Home Guards) masquerading as villagers with dhotis and blankets on their person. The bulging revolvers could be easily noticed. But more importantly, when asked about the identity, the police personnel agreed that they were from the Home Guards. Mr Tirki said, even the women they met found out to be women police personnel in mufti.

It was found those who had been brought to oppose the agitationists had all gone and, only the empty camps could be seen, he added.

Dr Vinayan observed that, when the District Magistrate of Baroda was asked about the whereabouts of people of Gujarat who had been opposing agitationists, he said that they had gone into hiding in the forest as was a normal practice for them in the daytime. Dr Vinayan asserted, however, that none could be seen in two-km area into Gujarat.

He further noted that on Tuesday, about 50 hooligans were allowed to cross through the prohibited area and allowed to abuse the agitationists and observers in the presence of the Collector and the SP of Baroda. They had been brought by the Gujarat State Transport Service and were suspected to be police personnel. This was to provoke the peaceful agitationists, he stated.

He expressed his fears that in case of a confrontation, the police in the garb of civilians would kill them. He reiterated that the agitationists wanted to stop the work non-violently and were without arms. Women and children were also present with them, he added.

Meanwhile, Dr Sharma along with some of the tribal representatives and social workers who had been trying hard to convince the Prime Minister to review the project came disappointed. In their last meeting with the Prime Minister on Tuesday, Mr Chandra Shekhar refused to listen to any of their demands saying that as the construction of the dam had already been started, he would not discuss anything about it.

Statesman. 3 Jan, 1991

# Activists' bid to reach dam site foiled

FERKUVA (GUJARAT) (PTI) Two more attempts by anti-Narmada agitators to march to the dam site to stop construction work were thwarted by police after they crossed into Gujarat here yesterday.

Defying prohibitory orders, their hands tied as a symbol of their belief in "non-violence," the marchers came in two batches of 27 each but were stopped by police.

The agitators, seen off by social activist Baba Amte near Chandpur in Madhya Pradesh, made repeated pleas to police to permit them to proceed to the dam site.

However, when the police refused permission, they squatted along with the batch of anti-narmada activists who also had made a futile attempt to reach the dam site on Wednesday.

Two members of parliament and Plains Tribal Council of India president Samar Choudhary appealed to the president, prime minister and the chief ministers of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh to initiate a dialogue with the Narmada Bachao Andolan's *Sangharsh Yatra* (combat march) to avoid confrontation.

In a statement here on Wednesday, the MPs — Piyush Tirke (RSP) of West Bengal and Bagun Sumrai (Cong-I) — and Choudhary said that if a confrontation occurred, it would not remain confined to people affected by Sardar Sarovar Project in the Narmada valley, but would spread to the entire adivasi heartland.

The agitation for the "right to life" of the project-affected people has been wrongly made out as an agitation against the state, he said.

Meanwhile, commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Dr B D Sharma, who was a member of a team which visited the dam area, was of the view that the agitation was peaceful and non-violent.

Dr Sharma said there was no opposition from the side of the Gujarat farmers.

Ruling out the possibility of a clash between agitators and the farmers, he said it was the Gujarat police and administration which wanted to repress the agitation.

He accused the administration of fabricating a story about the possibility of confrontation between the agitators and the farmers.

Independent. 4 Jan, 1991.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Ferkuwa, N.P.-Gujarat border
January 3, 1991

Thousands Brave Chilly Nights to Stop the Dam.

Thousands of tribals and peasants from the Narmada Valley, along with their supporters all over India, are still undeterred and defiant despite the coldest nights of the year and equally arrogant response from the other side of the fence - that is, the dam builders. They spent their tenth night in the open fields, with the resolve to reach the damsite for a peaceful satyagraha to stop the work on the dam. They have been demanding a comprehensive review of the entire Narmada Project in view of the new facts, approaches and issues that have arisen due to the Narmada Bachao Andolan since last five years. The review too should be done with the participation of the anti-project agitation in the valley, the demand stands.

In view of the recent happenings at various levels proving the unjustifiability and unviability of the dam, the Narmada Bachao Andolan had decided to launch the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra from Dec. 25, 1990 to demand the right to life and the immediate review of the project.

As the agitators reached the Gujarat boundary on December 31, after 7 days of tiresome Long March they were confronted with the government sponsored rally of pro-dam Gujaratis. The Sangharsh Yatra has seized the opportunity to start a dialogue with the people of Gujarat. Therefore they invited the representatives and organisers of the this 'anti-rally' for talks. However, the other side was not prepared for this peace initiative. They had ostensibly gathered for confrontation and violent action, the preparation for which has been done for days through government machinery, the police and the Gujarati press. The Sangharsh Yatris had sent a delegation including Baba Amte, representing the Valley to persuade the pro-dam agitators. Despite their best efforts no response could be elicited.

The Andolan then announced a 40 hour deadline for a response failing which the next course of action could be decided. Interestingly enough Mr. Chunnibhai Vaidya, a veteran Gandhian from Gujarat, and Mr. Krishna Prasad Patel of the Narmada Samarthan Abhiyan, who had talks with the Andolan in the late hours of the first day of the English New Year, clearly refused to take any responsibility of the pro-dam agitators who were not at all an organised force according to their own admission.

Finally the Andolan decided to send a jatha of 25 representatives into Gujarat on the expiry of the deadline. They crossed the border with their hands tied with black ribbons, chanting slogans, led by Bhagwan Bhai Barda. The Gujarat police stopped them at the barricade while the pro-dam agitators were allowed unhindered. The double standards adopted by Gujarat police were deprecated by even the journalists there. The so-called confrontation between the two peoples aptly reflects the basic difference of values, concepts of development, the mode of agitation and socio-economic bases between the two sides, says Smt. Medha Patkar, the moving force behind the agitation. It is interesting to note that the Long March on foot by the tribals and peasants for over seven days is sought to be responded to by an alliance of commercial-industrial and religious interests backed by the politicians and the state machinery. The Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and

Industries, the Association of Travel and Tour Agencies, the powerful Khedut Sangha (organisation of big peasants), the Swami Narayan Trust - all were eager to practically crush even the voice of protest in the Narmada Valley. It was a sequel to the pro-dam rally in Bombay on June 7, with the same composition.

Political Moorings:

As the Sangharsh Yatra began, over five hundred representatives of tribal organisations from all parts of India launched a dharna in front of Rashtrapati Bhavan from December 27. Their demands included the tribals' right to life and right over their resources. As a symbol of their struggle they had taken up the issue of Narmada Bachao Andolan. They raised the issue when their delegation met the President, Mr. R. Venkataraman. The President expressed sympathy with the cause and is reportedly in favour of changes in the Sardar Sarovar plan. They also met the Prime Minister, Mr. Chandra Shekhar, and insisted on review of the Narmada Project.

In another development the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Mr. B.D. Sharma, met the President and handed him a letter calling for initiating "such measures .... under Article 339(2) of the Constitution" to provide protection to the tribal people under President's special powers. Dr. Sharma had also written to the Prime Minister to start the process of negotiations with the tribals and their representatives. The Commissioner also sent a fact finding mission to Ferkuwa (Gujarat - MP border) in view of the escalating tension and the adamant attitude of the Gujarat government.

Moreover six members of Parliament issued a statement condemning the atmosphere of confrontation being created by Gujarat government and called for a dialogue on the issues of the Andolan. They expressed full support to the struggle of adivasis and opposed any move to oust them without their consent. The signatories include Mr. Piyush Tirkey (RSP). The issue of SSP and Sangharsh Yatra was raised in the current winter session of Parliament.

As the present deadlock continues, over six thousand people from the Narmada Valley continue defiantly to brave the cold wave sweeping the state in the open fields. With them are various representatives of mass movements elsewhere including the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, Sosht Jan Andolan, tribal organisations from Bastar and Gadchiroli, the groups from Kerala, Samaj Parivartan Samudaya from Karnataka, peasant organisations from Rajasthan, Lok Adhikar Sangh and Adivasi Samata Ekta, other groups from Bombay, New Delhi, Pune, Dhulia, Baroda, Surat, Bhavanagar, Ahmedabad, Indore, Bhopal, Raipur, Bangalore. Mr. Yukio Tanaka of Friends of Earth, a Japanese environmental action group is also with the Yatra.

SHAILENDRA YASHWANT

Baba Amte being stopped by senior Gujarat government officials at the border with Madhya Pradesh near Ferkuva on Monday

# Narmada oustees enter Gujarat

Nachiketa Desai and
Ranvir Nayar
in Ferkuva

THIRTY-FIVE oustees of the Sardar Sarovar Project entered Gujarat yesterday afternoon with their hands tied and singing, *"Koi nahin hatega, bandh nahin banega."*

They were stopped 50 metres from Bhoder bridge where government-sponsored pro-dam demonstrators were staging a counter-dharna. The entry of the marchers into Gujarat seemed imminent late on Tuesday night when last ditch efforts by the government to convince them to call off the march failed. Noted Gandhian Chinnibhai Vaidya had been sent to the marchers' camp by the Gujarat chief minister for negotiations.

According to Medha Patkar, the talks failed because the government was not prepared to accept the basic demand of the marchers. Addressing a crowded press conference on the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border, Patkar said the anti-dam marchers wanted all work of the project to be halted before the talks began.

She said the Narmada Bachao Andolan was prepared to meet the pro-dam demonstrators. However, the pro-dam activists were not willing to accept the technical objections raised by the anti-dam marchers saying that the Andolan was not competent or authorised to discuss technical matters, she said.

"The NBA is willing to discuss the mode of carrying the struggle on within the framework of Indian democracy. Even on that issue, they are not prepared to have a discussion," she said.

Morever, the 40-hour deadline given to the government had expired by 10 am. The marchers, including four women hailing from the villages of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh crossed the Gujarat border and had covered about 1,500 metres when they were stopped by four policemen and an executive magistrate.

Independent Jan 4, 91

# 140 anti-dam activists held

FERKUA (Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border), Jan. 4 (UNI): In a swift development tonight, the Gujarat police arrested about 140 Narmada bachao andolan activists and pushed several hundred others back into Madhya Pradesh.

Andolan volunteers participating in the indefinite sit-in just beyond the inter-state border here, said the police asked them to move back into Madhya Pradesh or face arrest while they were having their meal.

A few minutes later, the police descended on the volunteers and beat up some of them while other were arrested, they said.

In the melee, most of those participating in the sit-in moved back into Madhya Pradesh.

The Baroda district collector Tapan Ray said 140 people were rounded up for violation of prohibitory orders.

The indefinite sit-in was being staged at two police barricades inside Gujarat, a little distance away from the inter-state border. The main body of the andolan sangharsh yatra, consisting of several thousand people, had been camping at the border here since December 31.

TOINS adds:

Though the demonstrators, like in the last two days, came with their hands tied in a symbolic gesture of total non-violence, they jostled with the police and home guards personnel posted at the point and attempted to break the cordon by pushing with their shoulders.

What seems to have incensed the otherwise peaceful volunteers of the Narmada bachao andolan, which is spearheading the anti-dam agitation, is the change in the stand of the district authorities apparently to isolate each group of protestors. While for the last four days since anti-dam marchers reached the border point on December 31, the authorities were allowing the demonstrators to enter about half-a-kilometre into the state before being stopped, despite the imposition of the prohibitory orders, today's batches were prevented from proceeding further within 50 metres inside the state.

The action-packed day began with the entry of Baba Amte himself in the morning followed by the ambulance which always stays with him in case of any emergency. But at the border itself, the Baba was told politely by the district collector, Mr Tapan Roy, that the authorities would have no objection to his marching in but it would not allow the ambulance to follow.

The shocked Baba Amte questioned the decision to prevent his ambulance van to follow particularly because on December 31, under similar circumstances, the van was allowed to be taken till the point where he himself was also stopped within 50 metres from the Bhorda river bridge where the pro-dam demonstrators are squatting to block the entry of the rival camp followers.

Baba Amte insisted on going ahead for another "dialogue" with the "people of Gujarat" but the counter-slogans from the pro-dam demonstrators indicating their refusal to hear him out forced him to walk back beyond the border point in Madhya Pradesh after waiting for about half-an-hour.

The Baba's return was followed by the entry of 34 women volunteered of the anti-dam camp who were allowed to go up to the 50-metre barrier and after some initial arguments, sat down joining in a sit-in dharna with 70 others who had crossed the border during the last two days.

The quietness of the afternoon was shattered sometime later when another batch of 50 andolan volunteers tried to cross the border with their hands tied. They were prevented at the newly-created barricade within 100 metres from the border point with police and the home guards cordoning off the entire area.

Times of India 5th Jan, 91

# Anti-dam activists roughed up

Nachiketa Desai
in Ferkuva

SCORES OF anti-dam marchers including women were roughed up by the police and seven social activists arrested when more than 200 satyagrahis tried to push their way into Gujarat from Madhya Pradesh on Friday.

One hundred and seventeen anti-dam marchers were detained as a preventive measure late last night.

Policemen manhandled social activist Chitrarupa Dewan whose sari and blouse were torn, forcing her to change in the presence of all. Undettered, she attempted once again to break the police cordon but was lifted by six women home guards and dragged across the fields to a police tent.

The police then swooped on individual activists and whisked them away to waiting buses. Other anti-dam marchers who had crossed over to Gujarat staged a sit-in on the road to protest against the police action.

The police action commenced immediately after 200 of the 6,000 oustees camping at the Gujarat border in Madhya Pradesh for the last five days crossed the border with their hands tied, symbolic of their slogan *"Hamla chahe jaisa hoga, haath hamara nahin uthega."*

While the police allowed a batch of 24 women to proceed to the second barrier about 50 meters away from the bridge where the government-sponsored pro-dam dharna was being held, the next two batches were stopped immediately after they entered Gujarat.

When repeated requests to allow them to proceed further were turned down by the cops, the marchers tried to break the cordon. A scuffle followed.

Earlier, eminent social worker Baba Amte was prevented from crossing over to Gujarat and joining other anti-dam marchers who have been camping near the bridge for the last two days.

Even as the anti-dam marchers were stopped by cops near the Madhya Pradesh border, a batch of over 30 pro-dam activists arrived and were made to sit face-to-face with the anti-dam marchers.

"This is a blatant misuse of powers by the Gujarat police and a devious attempt by the government to instigate people against the peaceful satyagraha," said Amte.

Anti-dam marchers are thinking of challenging this action of the Gujarat police in the high court under Section 144 of the CrPC, according to Girish Patel, a leading lawyer.

In a move to cover Friday's police excesses on women activists, a case has been registered against the anti-dam marchers wherein they have been charged with roughing up the women home guards. The state information department has issued a press release from Vadodra giving details of the alleged assault.

Independent 5 Jan, 91

# STATEMENT BY ~~TRIBAL~~ MPs TO BREAK THE DEADLOCK IN THE NARMADA VALLEY

We, the undersigned, who had a dialogue with the representatives of various tribal organisations from different parts of the country are extremely concerned about the continuing confrontation in the Narmada Valley. There is urgent need to diffuse this situation particularly since over 6,000 people - men, women and children - most of whom are tribals, have been walking for the past ten days in very cold weather.

We therefore demand -

1. that the Government immediately announce a dialogue with representatives of the Sangharsh Yatra. A tripartite dialogue - between the Central Government, State Governments and the Andolan representatives - should be initiated for reaching an understanding with the people.

2. that the Gujarat Government immediately withdraw the police massed on the border and permit the Sangharsh Yatra to proceed to the Dam site.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN
PRESS STATEMENT by Advocate Girish Patel
January 5, 1991.

Gujarat Police Let Loose Terror and Repression on Activists
The Gujarat police exposed their repressive and arbitrary nature when they assaulted activists yesterday, particularly the tribal women and treated the women activists indecently, flouting all norms of justice, law and civil rights. The police and the administration have made a mockery of the legal provisions, particularly s.144 IPC adopting double standards.

On Friday, 4th January, continuing the programme of peaceful entry in Gujarat for last two days, three groups of the Sangharsh Yatris, the anti Sardar Sarovar activists, crossed the Gujarat border. The first group, consisting of 25 women with a 6 year old girl, entered at 11 a.m. and joined the earlier 'jatha' of activists. Another group of 200 Sangharsh Yatris was stopped by the police. There were some women police with male police in civilian dress behind. The women police started pushing back the Yatris with fists. The manhandling and the scuffle made Mrs. Rupabai Sitaram Yadav of Chhota Badada unconscious. Two female activists, Chittaroopa and Jayashree were caught by the male police in civilian dress and were dragged mercilessly to the police van, deliberately tearing some of their clothes. The shameless indecency by Gujarat Police was accompanied by continuous abuses and assaults. The police also broke the spectacles of Brian Lobo, another activist. The activists, braving the atrocity, sat down there itself. The police brought some adivasis in front of them and made them sit opposite the Yatris.

Interestingly enough, while s.144 of IPC was in operation, disallowing the Yatris from entering the prohibited area, the homeguards or people from Gujarat side were moving unhindered in that area. It is clear that the Police are using s.144 in an absolutely arbitrary, discriminatory and partisan manner in clear violation of Article 14 of the Constitution.

In the evening after dusk, the police acted in a conspiratorial manner. While the jathas of Sangharsh Yatris were there for two days, the police had also allowed the Yatris to remain there in the prohibitory area, at the same time allowing the Gujarat side people to move freely. But on Friday evening, without any prior intimation, the police started beating the pickets and throwing out their beddings and eatables. (The pickets, most of them tribal activists, were having their food in the evening). The police first switched lights off. They turned on blaring music on the Gujarat side and then started taking 'action', which was violative of all the legal and constitutional norms and arbitrary in nature. They arrested most of the activists and carried them to far off places like Rajasthan border. When those who were brought to Rajasthan border refused to get off there, the police forcibly made them get off at Dahod.

The behaviour of police in Gujarat on Friday now fully brings out the repressive designs of the Government of Gujarat and the vested interests therein. Since the Sangharsh Yatris are continuing with their protests braving the chilly winter and all sorts of inconveniences, and when the state sponsored 'anti-rally' seems to be waning off, the power holders in Gujarat, as a mark of their frustration, have resorted to their only weapon against the struggling 'have nots' - repressive and arbitrary use of the law. It is the government fighting against the Sangharsh Yatra which is now fully exposed and about which we had no doubts although the government tried to pit the 'people of Gujarat' against the struggling Adivasis and peasants in the Narmada valley. However, the State forgets that the more repressive it becomes, the more resolute people will be.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Kerkuwa, M.P.-Gujarat border
LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER
January 8, 1991

SHREE CHANDRA SHEKHARJI,
The Prime Minister of India.

We were happy to meet you on December 17, '90 and we take this opportunity to express our thanks for having a free and frank exchange of views on the Sardar Sarovar Project - the symbol of destruction of right to life, equality and sustainable development of lakhs of common people, mostly poor, tribals and others backwards in the Narmada Valley.

We explained to you in detail about the various destructive aspects of the project; the irrational, distorted and faulty decision-making processes right from the beginning, unlawful and unjustifiable conditional environmental and forest clearance granted in 1987 and Planning Commission's sanction in 1988, with the non-fulfillment of the conditions therein till today. We also referred to the consequent deemed lapse of these clearances.

The resulting increase in foreign debts and entanglement of multinationals which generally follow such mega-projects and the massive dis-information campaign launched by the Gujarat government at huge public costs were other factors which were either ignored or inadequately considered in the Narmada Tribunal's proceedings.

The absence of basic studies before, during and after these proceedings, many new factors emerged after the Award, the establishment of the new Department of Environment and Forests in 1980 (which is perhaps the only department having concern and looking after socio-economic, human and environmental consequences of development projects), the conditional extension of credit by the World Bank, the impossibility of rehabilitation and resettlement of all affected people and the people's challenge to the very 'public purpose' or 'national interest' behind SSP must necessarily lead to the inevitable conclusion, viz. the entire project must be reviewed from a human, environmental, socio-economic, financial and sustainable developmental aspects and till then such construction work on the SSP must be stopped as it would make the project irreversible.

You were frank and said that you would definitely look into what we pointed out. You specifically referred to the seriousness of our objection regarding the non-fulfillment of the basic conditions subject to which the clearances were given. However you pointed out that the project is the decision of previous governments and it would be difficult to reverse the decision. We in turn pointed out that Shri V.P. Singh, your predecessor, clearly admitted that our struggle raised certain fundamental issues and deserved an immediate dialogue. The very next day (May 18, '90) our representatives had a 2-hour discussion with the top officials of all important departments and we submitted to the P.M. our demand for (1) the review of the project (2) the nature of the authorised committee, and (3) its modus operandi. But thereafter no further development could take place because of the political development.

We were happy that you never flatly refused to accede to our demand for total review. You naturally referred to your difficulties. In spite of this, it is unfortunate that leaders of Gujarat, both governmental and non-governmental have indulged in a

massive misinformation campaign through the local press, distorting and misrepresenting what you have said to us.

It is in this context that we are writing to you from our camp on the way to Gujarat where not less than 3000 agitators are camping near the M.P. Gujarat border at Ferkuwa along our long padayatra towards the Sardar Sarovar dam site, with a firm demand for a total review of the Project and the suspension of irreversible work till done.

When the government of Gujarat is bent upon pushing ahead the construction so as to make it irreversible and a fait accompli, and is determined to suppress the people's movement by any means, thousands of representatives of the Project-affected people of the three states, mostly tribals and farmers, along with Baba Amte and other supporters from all over the country, decided to set out on a long barefoot Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra with a vow not to return until our demands are met. Our march is a peaceful, non-violent one in the true Gandhian spirit, with demands for the realisation and protection of our very right to life.

Against this peaceful march by men, women and children, the government of Gujarat has let loose a tirade of hatred, instigation and violence, using all its resources at its command, with the help of the local press, trade, industry, business houses and institutions like the Swaminarayan sect. The government's intention is to incite the people of Gujarat by appealing to narrow parochial feelings and to spread hatred and animosity between the people on both sides. It is another thing that, in spite of all this effort, there is no organised or strong movement in favour of the dam.

Our march has been stopped illegally, unconstitutionally and in an arbitrary manner. Sec. 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code is used by the police authorities, not to maintain law and order or to prevent offences, but to unduly favour Gujarat's pro-dam state-sponsored people and to bring about a situation where group clashes occur. This is absolutely illegal, discriminatory and against the clear judgement of the Supreme Court of India. The government has spent at least 1 crore rupees on the state-sponsored rally held on December 29, 1990. After realising the inexhaustible patience, tenacity and firmness of the Yatris, the police let loose, on 4th January, a reign of terror, assaulting, abusing and humiliating women Yatris, tearing their sarees and dresses, catching hold of them and dragging them to police jeeps. At 8 p.m. on the 4th of January, the police lathi charged the tribals and others sitting in dharna peacefully when they were sleeping or eating their food.

On January 5th, Baba Amte, along with 35 men and woman Yatris, have entered the Gujarat border but have been stopped 50 metres away from the M.P. border. All have decided to stay there and not come back because the Sardar Sarovar Project is a question of life and death for the people of the valley. Simultaneously, 63 of the Yatris have gone on a day-long fast in protest against police brutality.

# Amte on indefinite dharna

By Manas Das Gupta
The Times of India News Service
CHHOTA UDEPUR
(Baroda District), Jan. 5.

BABA AMTE, the leader of the Anti-Sardar Sarovar dam movement of the Narmada bachao andolan, has launched a dharna-unto-death inside Gujarat at the inter-state border at Ferkuva unless he is allowed to march forward or a settlement reached to the present stalemate.

Talking to reporters from what he called his "death-bed", the baba said he had not yet decided whether to convert his dharna into a fast-unto-death." But nothing is certain. I am not going back to the Madhya Pradesh border anymore and only my dead body will either be eaten by vultures right on this road or be sent back to M.P.," he said.

The announcement of his indefinite dharna came after his third attempt to march to Kevadia Colony, the Sardar Sarovar dam site, to stage a sit-in protest in a bid to stop the construction work, was foiled again today, first by the women home guards and later by, local people.

The situation at the Ferkuva front has returned to that existing on December 31, when the anti-dam rallyists reached the state border, with the baba and his 26 followers holding a dharna and a day's token fast almost face-to-face with the pro-dam rallyists squatting on the Bhorda River bridge.

All the anti-dam rallyists arrested yesterday were released today. The seven activists arrested yesterday afternoon following a tussle with the police and home guards were also released on bail. The charges framed against them are also likely to be dropped.

The andolan's firebrand leader, Ms Medha Patkar, and advocate activist, Mr Girish Patel, along with 58 other volunteers, have also launched a 24-hour fast since this afternoon to protest against police excesses on unarmed and peaceful satyagrahis last night at the border point in M.P. where the main bunch of the rallyists are staging a dharna.

The day began with the baba making yet another bid to reach Kevadia colony, followed by his ambulance van and 26 of his followers.

Unlike yesterday, when the district authorities disallowed permission for his ambulance van to follow him right at the border point, the authorities today did not prevent its entry.

But at the 100-metre barrier from the border, the baba and his men were stopped by the women home guards. In view of the scuffle yesterday, the authorities today had kept only women home guards at the first barrier with the male home guards falling behind to form a protective cordon. The senior civil and police officials had preferred to stay behind the curtain.

The baba first pleaded with the home guards to let him go but when he failed to get any response or an answer to his queries as to why he should not be allowed to go ahead, the baba supported by his followers gave several pushes every few minutes, but failed to break the cordon of women home guards. By then the entire group was cordoned off from all sides and the baba's repeated pleas to let him go at least to the people of Gujarat fell on deaf ears.

Sunday Mail 6 Jan, 91

# Cold New Year for Narmada agitators

by Mahesh Pandya

Ferkuva (Vadodra Distt): As the entire western Madhya Pradesh reels under a cold wave, with the mercury dipping below two degrees Celsius, a battle of nerves continues in this neighbouring Gujarati border village.

The 5,000-strong anti-Sardar Sarovar Project Sangharsh Yatra reached the border on the eve of the New Year after a week's march from Barwani of Khargone district. The battle lines are drawn with 1,500 personnel of the Gujarat police, rural police and Home Guards lined along the steel-pipe barricades 100 metres from the border. The 100m stretch is a "no-man's land." With prohibitory orders in effect for another 100m beyond that, the district collector, local SDM and top police officers are campaigning here for the past five days. The state public relations department has opened a temporary office at nearby Chhota Udeypur town with hot lines.

Fifty Sangharsh Yatra volunteers, with their hands tied crossed the border on Friday morning and sat on dharna as they were prevented by the police from proceeding to the dame site in Kevadia Navgon.

About 3,000 people are brought every day from different parts of the state in public transport buses. Swaminarayan sanyasins are providing them with food packets everyday. The whole show is managed by an umbrella body of Gujarati business firms, the Narmada Foundation Trust and a network of voluntary bodies called Narmada Abhiyan. Gujarat Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel landed up in his helicopter to address the crowd twice before New Year.

It was New Year's eve and the crowd was singing: *"Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram Baba ko sanmati de bhagwan"*_ when Amte, much-maligned and hated person in Gujarat after the abuses hurled on him in the local press linked with allegations that his movement is foreign-funded, made an appearance on the scene. He just wanted to greet the people of Gujarat on an auspicious occasion.

After his and other anti-dam leaders' repeated pleas to have a dialogue with them failed, he had to wait for three hours or so in his ambulance hearing the abuses hurled on him.

Collector Tapan Ray managed to persuade the crowd to listen to Amte, "I am hungry for your love" started he, calling the gigantic dam project a symbol of mere greed for size. He was referring to the project that would displace about 200,000 people, mostly tribals, to make Gujarat more prosperous.

There was pindrop silence. Then an activist from Delhi, Ashish Kothari began to talk in Gujarati, but he was curtly stopped.

Meanwhile on the Madhya Pradesh side of the border Meedha Patkar and other young activists, many of them working in Narmada valley for three years for more, were giving fiery speeches:- But urging for non-violence, *"Hamla chahe kaisa hoga haath hamare nahi uthega."*

There were hopes of defusing tension as a six-member Central observers team led by Piyush Tirke M.P. of the RSP from West Bengal, reached the spot. The team was sent by the commissioner for SC/ST affairs, B.D. Sharma. After talks in Gujarat Tirke addressed the *Yatriks:* "More and more tribals are being uprooted for development,"

Ironically, they are not benefitted by the projects either, he said while drawing parallels with the agitations in Jharkhand and Bastar. The team left for Delhi the same day.

None other than the Prime Minister expressed similar sentiments as he addressed the Indian Science Congress in Indore on Thursday. Tribals from Tamil Nadu to Tripura are troubled. He called for an alternative to the present wrong development which was harming the interests of the rural poor.

Times of India
6 Jan, '91

# Clumsy handling of a bitter confrontation

**Sardar Sarovar controversy**

LIKE the two banks to this river, Narmada, there are two sides to the issue. One is the Gujarat Government which is committed to exploiting the water resources that can be harnessed from the river valley for the State's agrarian development. It is not only unwavering in its commitment to this gigantic project but also is quite aggressive in its efforts to reinforce its claims on the river, ignoring the impact it might have on the valley's eco-system. The other side, resolute in its commitment to save the valley, has been opposing the project for a time long enough to call the movement "sustained."

However, the two sides have not been able to sit together and discuss the issues and persuade each other. The strong stand taken by the articulate among the 'green' precludes such a possibility even though the Gujarat Government would like to "discuss the issue" provided that halting the project or reviewing its impact is not also demanded. The stipulation that the Gujarat Government has been laying for any talks prejudges the issue and directs the outcome.

### Surface of flashpoint

No wonder then, that even the one round of talks — and significantly, the one and only of its kind so far — held in New Delhi between the Gujarat Minister for Narmada Development, Mr. Babubhai Patel, and the anti-dam groups, failed to produce any result and as the icy winds took hold of the tribal region around Chota Udepur on the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border towards the last few days of 1990, the flashpoint surfaced when the pro-and anti-dam sides confronted each other. The Narmada Bachao Andolan wanted to reach the dam site in Kevadia and halt all the irreversible works.

Given the past, such a confrontation was inevitable. It was building up for at least three years. With regard to Gujarat, its former Chairman of the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam, Mr. Sanat Mehta had once described the movement's initiator, Ms. Medha Patkar, as "unreasonable" and once had even questioned her patriotism in the presence of a World Bank team. Baba Amte was characterised as "an outsider" by others. The inclination to talk to these people came, but much too late. By then, the positions had hardened far beyond the stage where one could expect any flexibility.

The anti-dam protagonists too have been shrill in their enunciations of disapproval of a project which would perhaps help substantially to mitigate the impact of the frequent droughts. Besides, the stages through which the anti-dam sentiments evolved — from doubts about equity for the losers of land because of submergence to total opposition — scared the people of Gujarat. With sufficient help from the Government and the political establishment, the people were led to believe that Gujarat's progress was being sought to be halted in its tracks.

Now, attempts are being made to defuse the tension around Ferkuwa, a tiny place which did not have an identity of its own on the Gujarat — MP border and has come into prominence being the theatre of the pro-and anti-dam exhortations. These attempts to bring "peace between the people of Gujarat" and the opponents of the dam are only cosmetic. What is needed is a resolution of the ideological confrontation.

That, perhaps is extremely unlikely. To build the dam and inundate large tracts of lands to form the Sardar Sarovar is now an issue of such political mileage for the various political parties that no quarter is likely to be given to the anti-dam movement. The police force deployed on the border by the Gujarat Government has given a feeling that the State is fighting an enemy-invader.

Not only that, several of the policemen deployed have come in civvies to shout slogans along with the mass of people congregating on the border to form a human chain to prevent the Narmada Andolan activists and the tribals of the valley, indicating a high level of State sponsorship of the pro-dam rally, addressed by politicians of all hues, including the Chief Minister, Mr. Chimanbhai Patel. Political enemies came together on one platform to proclaim to the world that the wide spectrum of interests in Gujarat is together on this issue.

Reports indicate that passions are high on the Gujarat side of the border, where people have been camping in the open and sitting across a narrow bridge on a small river as a human barricade to foil attempts of the anti-dam volunteers to reach Kevadia. However, what was for the goose, was not for the gander, since the Gujarat Government officialdom ensured that the prohibitory order was enforced strictly only to keep the activists out, even as State patronage turned a blind eye to the hordes it brought to the border point to demonstrate a unity of purpose behind building the dam.

### No place in Gujarat

Was this bitterness avoidable? It would appear that the Narmada Bachao Andolan, in spite of its building a plank indicating support from other ecologically conscious groups in the country, reflected in for instance, the famous Harsud resolution of 1989 to "drown than give up the valley" failed to take note of an important fact. It needed a minimum toe-hold at least to have a presence in Gujarat and to identify those who would support it in the event of a flashpoint which has now come about. It even chose to ignore those who agreed to ensure that the Government kept its promises on the issue of rehabilitation.

Its organisation of protests was always outside Gujarat because it failed to reach out with persuasiveness to the people of Gujarat and instead got into an increasingly abrasive and bitter mode of posturing. Those who were inclined to be supportive were turned off by the highly personalised form of leadership. Meanwhile, the voluntary sector is already riven with dissensions in Gujarat — and today they are scared of making supportive statements.

Consequently, in this event, with its epicentre around Ferkuwa, the larger issue of destructive development route taken by the State, which is also very expensive and not very people-friendly in the long run, has not surfaced in Gujarat, making it easier for the establishment to gather support for the building of the dam, describing it as a lifeline of the State. Mr. Babubhai Patel, although not well disposed towards Mr. Chimanbhai Patel and belonging to a different and even principled political clan, chose to join the Government "just to build the dam."

### World Bank aid

The popular feeling fuelled by Government inputs is so strong that at one point of time, Mr. Chimanbhai Patel said that the Government could build the dam without the World Bank aid and that the people "can themselves pay for it, if it comes to the crunch." Mr. Babubhai Patel says that if it can be built on schedule — a day saved is Rs. 400 crores saved — then "we can do it with no external aid." And Mr. Amte and Ms. Patkar have been battling this sentiment with spirit.

One weakness in this movement is that it has somehow failed to capitalise on the sympathy generated initially when the cause was equity to be secured by the provisions of land for the land lost. The Gujarat Government fashioned perhaps the best rehabilitation package possible but the movement failed to zero in on the lapses and show up the Government as incapable of handling such a delicate and sensitive task. There are instances of people being uprooted from the tribal ethos and transplanted on a 'land for land' principle but there was no pasture available for their cattle transported at Government expense!

### Glossed over

These facts were glossed over and only cited in passing and then when land was sought to be secured for rehabilitation from forest tracts, then only 'principles' came to the fore converting the entire exercise into one of confrontation at every phase. In its inability to stage a sit in anywhere in Gujarat, the activists had to choose locations such as Bombay and Delhi, where it received substantive media attention, it was targeted successfully for being an "attack on the interests of the State by outsiders." To its misfortune, few of the activists were even Gujarati speaking.

Though the anti-dam groups have demonstrated that politically the entire Gujarat is one on this issue and have opposed the possible review of the project, the poor handling of the issues by the anti-dam activists has managed to help Gujarat to convey that it is 'pro-people,' rather than the fact that it is not friendly to environment and that, in its greed for economic profit, has chosen to exploit a distinct ecosystem of a river valley which is considered holy enough to be circumambulated by the reverential. The very fact that the Government has agreed to compensatory afforestation in distant Kutch rather than the valley itself is a case in point.

**Mahesh Vijapurkar**

The Hindu, Madras 6 Jan, 91

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Ferkuwa, M.P.-Gujarat border
PRESS STATEMENT
6th Jan., 1991.

Medha Patkar and Four Others to Launch Indefinite Hunger Strike

As a sequel to the thirteen days of the Long March against the Sardar Sarovar, Smt. Medha Patkar, the moving spirit behind the anti-dam agitation will be launching an indefinite hunger strike from Monday, 7th January, to demand a full review of the controversial project with the stoppage of work on the dam.

Smt. Patkar made this declaration at Ferkuwa border in the morning session of the rally held at the Sangharsh Yatra camp, at the end of 24 hours hunger strike against the repressive measures adopted by the Gujarat Police. Along with her, four more representatives from the Narmada valley are expected to join the indefinite hunger strike. The declaration came on the heels of thirteen days of the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra by the tribals and peasants of the Narmada Valley and the war of nerves between the Gujarat government and the Movement.

On the other hand, veteran leader Baba Amte, along with 28 representatives from the valley are still within the Gujarat border, confronted by about two hundred pro-dam protesters. These picketeers were led by Mrs. Urmilaben Patel, wife of the Gujarat Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel, Mr. K.Z. Patel, Harivallabh Parikh and others of Narmada Samarthan Abhiyan. They kept on showering abuses on Baba Amte and the Andolan all the night.

In another development, six members of Parliament who had supported the Sangharsh Yatra in a statement earlier, will be sitting on a dharna in front of Rashtrapati Bhavan from Sunday. Meanwhile, the fact-finding team sent by the Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, led by Piyush Tirkey, M.P. has released its report.

Earlier, in a letter to the Prime Minister Mr. Chandra Shekhar Smt. Patkar made it clear that the Narmada Bachao Andolan is left with 'no alternative but to raise the issue on moral plane and appeal to the conscience of the nation by undertaking indefinite fast', as the Prime Minister failed to bring the three concerned governments to agree to the Centre to the demand of the review of the entire project within a time bound framework and the stoppage of the irreversible work till then.

Smt. Patkar has referred to the talks with the Prime Minister, held on December 17, 1990 in which the representatives of the movement explained the entire issue painstakingly and put forth a reasonable demand of the review. Regretting that the people's movement in Narmada valley is now facing an unresponsive Centre and absolutely immoral and undemocratic tactics of the Gujarat Government, the letter declares that 'the issue before us is no longer in the realm of narrow political calculations ...the question now is that of basic human rights, constitutional principles, moral and civilizational values.

Neither political considerations, nor the amount of the Project work already carried out (which, anyway, is barely 6-7% of the total) should be allowed to come in the way of such review of the project with the participation of the people's organisation in the Narmada valley, the letter pointed out. Explaining in detail the basic anomalies in the conception and decisions about the project, the letter made it clear that 'the entire project must be reviewed from a human, environmental, socio-economic, financial and developmental aspects'. Till then such construction work on the project which would make it irreversible must be stopped, Smt. Patkar said.

# Narmada activists to fast

By SHAILESH PANDYA

The Times of India News Service

FERKUVA, January 6.

BABA Amte, the social activist staging dharna unto death inside the prohibited area of Gujarat border since yesterday, was administered a bottle of glucose and saline after he fell down near the toilet.

Meanwhile, Ms Medha Patkar, leader of the Narmada Bachao Samiti, announced an indefinite hunger strike from tomorrow.

The Baba could not sleep last night due to the noise of "bhajans" and slogans chanted by the large number of pro-Narmada rallyists across the bridge on the Bhorda river and he felt exhausted.

The Baroda district collector, Mr Tapan Ray, camping in this village, rushed a team of medical personnel to examine the Baba and extend all medical facilities to him.

The Gujarat chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, has asked the collector to take care of the Baba and provide him with all facilities.

Dr G. C. Patel from the community health services at Chhota Udepur town, about 30 kms away, was summoned to examine him. After the examination he said Baba's health was okay and there was no cause for worry.

Mr Ray said the state government would extend all help to the Baba and see that he got the best treatment. Ms Medha Patkar, camping at Chandpur in Madhya Pradesh, near the Gujarat border, was summoned to meet the Baba.

The collector asked the leaders of pro-Narmada rallyists to stop using loudspeakers as Baba required rest.

The pro-Narmada rallyists responded to this demand and stopped using microphones.

Dr Patel said the Baba had hypertension and might be hospitalised later depending upon his condition.

Ms Patkar, leading the anti-Narmada activists today announced her decision to launch an indefinite hunger strike from tomorrow demanding a full review of the Sardar Sarovar project across the Narmada river at Kevadia in Rajpipla subdivision of Broach district, and calling a halt to the construction work of the dam till the review process was over.

Meanwhile, Mr Sanat Mehta, former chairman of the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Ltd (SSNL), today offered fruit juice to Ms Urmilaben Patel, president of the Gujarat Women's Action Group and wife of the Gujarat Chief Minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, Mr Haribhai Panchal of Sadvichar Parivar, Mr Ramesh Shah of Narmada Resettlement Samiti and Mr Jivanbhai Patel, who were on fast since yesterday protesting against the violent tactics adopted by the supporters of Baba Amte and Ms Patkar.

Addressing a large group of pro-Narmada rallyists across the Bhorda river, Mr Mehta criticised the Baba for launching a dharna unto death saying it was not the form of Satyagraha preached by Mahatma Gandhi.

According to Mr Mehta, Mahatma Gandhi had used satyagraha for the welfare of the society. The Baba's agitation could not be described as satyagraha because he had launched it with the purpose of depriving drinking water to the parched land of Saurashtra, north Gujarat and Kutch.

On the other hand, Baba Amte along with the representatives from the valley are still within the Gujarat border, confronted by about 200 pro-dam activists led by Ms Urmila Ben Patel, Mr K. Z. Patel, Mr Harivallabha Parikh and of the Narmada Samarthan Abhiyan. In another development, six Members of Parliament, who had supported the Sangharsha Yatra in a statement earlier, will be sitting on a dharna in front of the Rashtrapati Bhavan from today.

Times of India 7-1-91

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Nachiketa Desai
in Ferkuva

EMINENT social worker Baba Amte began a dharna unto death in front of the government sponsored pro-Sardar Sarovar project demonstrators yesterday evening on the Gujarat government failed in its bid to terrorise the anti-dharna marchers through the police who assaulted and molested women satyagrahis on Friday night.

Baba Amte too was pushed around for over half-an-hour by women home guards as he entered the Gujarat territory at 11.35 am along with over a dozen anti-dam marchers. He was also restrained by the home guards for over five hours.

Meanwhile, 58 anti-dam marchers including social activists Medha Pathak and eminent lawyer Girish Patel began a 24-hour fast at the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border in protest against Friday's night police assault on satyagrahis staging a sit-in dharna inside the Gujarat territory.

"The policemen started raining blows on us and molested the women satyagrahis tearing the clothes after switching off the floodlights at around 7.30 pm on Friday," said an angry Shanti Devi, leader of the Bhopal Gas Pidit Mahila Udyog Samiti.

She said the police assault came as a surprise as the satyagrahis were preparing for their dinner.

The police bundled them up in buses and released them 50 to 60 km away near Dohad.

By Saturday morning, the entire 1.5 km stretch from the Madhya Pradesh border to the Bhodra river bridge where the government-sponsored counter-dharna is being staged was cleared of all the anti-dam marchers who had crossed over to Gujarat during the last three days.

"It is the Stalin era in Gujarat under chief minister Chimanbhai Patel," remarked Baba Amte. "Where are the people? It is the govt which is stopping us," he said.

As if on cue, the police brought about 50 pro-dam demonstrators near the barrier where Baba Amte was being restrained by the home guards.

He pleaded with the women guards to let him proceed addressing them as "sisters and daughters." But the plea went unheeded.

Later, Baba Amte was allowed to proceed up to the Bhodra river bridge where about 300 youths were lying down to block his way. The chief minister wife, Urmilaben Patel, sarvodaya worker Hari Vallabh Parikh and other leaders of the Narmada Adhiyan Samiti had formed a chain to prevent the anti-dam marchers from proceeding further.

"Baba Amte *vapas jao*," and Gujarat *jhookega nahi, bandh rookega nahi*" stated the pro-dam demonstrators who were promptly silenced by their leaders.

"I can understand your supporting the dam but your saying Gujarat *rookega nahi* pains me more. I am not fighting a battle against Gujarat. I will prefer to die here rather than fight you," Baba Amte said.

He said the people of Gujarat would realise later how right he was about the destructive nature of the Sarodar Sarovar.

Independent
6 Jan. 1991

The Observer 7 Jan 1991

# The damning Narmada divide

By MANJEET SINGH

FERKUVA, (Gujarat Madhya Pradesh border), Jan 5: "Sardar Sarovar dhoka hai, dhakka maro, mauka hai" (Sardar Sarovar is a fraud, here is a chance to pull it down), is the war cry of the Jan Vikas Sangarsh Yatra which launched its 250 km.-long trek to the project site on the Narmada river from Rajghat (MP) last Christmas And while the *yatra* is on, the Gujarat government is hell bent on not allowing it that opportunity.

This border village has been the battleground since December 31. The *yatra* has pitched camp on the Madhya Pradesh side. The Gujarat government which sponsored the pro-dam protests against the *yatra* is trying its manipulative best to ward off the threat. The *yatris* are looking for a way to enter Gujarat. "Is that side Pakistan that our entry is prohibited?" asks Bhurabhai Patidat who has been with the *yatra* throughout.

The pro- and anti-dam protestors are a study in contrast. On the Madhya Pradesh side the *yatra* consists of tribals and villagers, a determined, defiant lot. On the Gujarat side they are mostly city louts and college students.

The anti-dam protestors have made it on foot to the border, whereas the pro-dam protestors were dumped in Gujarat in state transport buses specially requisitioned by the state government.

The former are gathered out in the open in abysmally low temperatures and the pro-dam fellows are ferried back daily to the security of their homes.

"We will go to the dam," says Medha Patkar, the soul and spirit of the *yatra*. "Yes" comes the encore from the tribals. They and the villagers sing songs written by them for the occasion. *Is liye raah sangarsh ki humne chuni* (We choose the path of struggle because...) is a popular number. But the pro-dam protestors keep up a steady chant of "Baba Amte go back", "We will make the dam at any cost".

As the loin-cloth clad tribals and villagers reached Alirajpur, 24 km from the border braving frosty weather on December 29 Chimanbha Patel, Gujarat chief minister flew into Ferkuva to addres a pro-dam rally attended b 40,000. He said, "Baba Amt has threatened *jal samadhi* the work on the dam proceeds Why allow him to die in th Narmada and pollute th waters?" he asked the pro-dan rally sponsored by the Gujara government.

Ferkuva has been converte into a cantonment. A nervou police force with a strengt of about 3000 is commandeere by lumpens and college stu dents all of them busloade to the border by the Gujara government. Since Decembe 25 massive police force wa deployed at the six entry point from M.P. into Gujarat. Som of the policemen even arreste newsmen covering the *yatra*

The day it commenced fro Badwani the town observed bandh. On the way whethe it was Kadmaal, Nisarpu Chikhalda, Kukshi, Silkuw Phaata, Nanpur, Alirajpu Lakshmani or Chandpur th *yatra* was given a warm we come in shouts of *"koi nahi hatega bandh nahin banega"* (none shall be displaced, th dam will not be constructe

Baba Amte is also travellin with the yatra. The Gujara government attempts to isola him from the *yatra*. The *yat* leaders realise this game Baba Amte issued a statemer decrying the game of th Gujarat leaders. In the mea while the Gujarat police int ligence is doing all it can penetrate the *yatra* and g advance information. But t 'suraksha dal' of the *yatra* too smart for them.

While the city louts continu to provoke the *yatra* protesto the Gujarat officials tried ha to persuade the leaders return. But the anti-da protestors are in no mood leave the border. The dete mined lot wants to ent Gujarat and go to Sarda Sarovar. "We will lose ever thing. Our houses, our lan everything will be submerge and still you want us return home. For us this is last-ditch battle for su vival," thunders Bhagwanbh of Chota Badada .

Medha Patkar specifies th basic ideology of the *yatra* She says that displacemer by Sardar Sarovar is unju and rehabilitation impossibl

# Baba Amte falls unconscious

Nachiketa Desai
in Ferkuva

EMINENT SOCIAL worker Baba Amte, who went on a fast unto death here on Saturday, fell unconscious on Sunday afternoon following a sleepless night due to constant slogan-shouting through loudspeakers by the government-sponsored pro-Sardar Sarovar project demonstrators.

Baroda district collector Tapan Ray, who rushed a medical team to attend to Baba Amte, ordered the demonstrators to turn off the loudspeakers. However, the slogan shouting continued without the loudspeakers.

Septuagenerian social worker Dr G C Patel said Amte recovered soon after being administered glucose and saline water. "There is no cuase for worry," he added.

He attributed the sudden giddiness experienced by Amte to exhaustion and sleeplessness.

Ray too admitted that Amte could not sleep throughout Saturday night due to the slogan shouting. One of these slogans went: *"Baba jago, Baba bhago."*

Amte, who entered Gujarat on Saturday along with nearly a dozen anti-dam marchers to begin a dharna unto death in front of the pro-dam demonstrators on the Bhodar bridge, fell unconsicous at around 5 pm while he was in the makeshift toilet in a nearby field. He was carried to the ambulance in a stretcher.

The pro-dam demonstrators clapped and jeered much to the embarassment of government officers and organisers of the counter-dharna as Amte was being carried out.

Even veteran Sarvodaya workers like Hari Vallabh Parikh and the Narmada Abhiyan Samiti's Haribhai Panchal, both of whom were present at the site, did not even inquire after Amte's health.

Meanwhile, social activist Medha Patkar and four other anti-dam activists announced their intention to go on an indefinite fast from Monday in support of their demands for a complete review of the multicrore Sardar Sarovar project.

Anti-dam activists, who have been advocating a people-to-people dialogue on the issue, distributed pamphlets on the Gujarat side explaining thier stand.

Significantly, the Gujarat police appears to have softened its stand towards the anti-dam activists who were allowed free movement inside the Gujarat territory yesterday.

Independent 7 Jan. 1991.

# Dahanu greens seek PM's intervention

A Staff Reporter

THE DAHANU Taluka Environment Protection Group has expressed solidarity with the ongoing struggle for saving the Narmada valley.

In a press statement issued here on Saturday, secretary of the DTEPG Nergis Irani said that the group had despatched letters to prime minister Chandrashekhar asking him to intervene in the matter and get the governments of Gujarat and Maharashtra to interact with the activists of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

The letter, dated January 4, says that the treatment meted out to Magsaysay award winner Baba Amte was shocking and would convey a poor image to the world about the state of democracy in India.

The letter has requested Chandrashekhar to pressure chief minister of Gujarat, Chimanbhai Patel, to initiate an unconditional dialogue with Amte.

The group has also written letters to chief ministers of Maharashra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh on the issue.

The letters say that the river project is a 'noose around the necks' of the three states and not the 'lifeline of Gujarat' as is being propagated by the Gujarat government.

# Foreign hand behind stir by Baba Amte: C. Patel

Flood FT

8/1/91

Our Correspondent

BOMBAY 7 JANUARY

THE Gujarat chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, today alleged that there was a foreign hand behind the agitation spherheaded by Baba Amte against the Narmada Sagar dam.

Talking to newsmen here, he charged that the agitation was sustained with the money supplied from foreign countries. He said that what Mr Amte was doing was not 'satyagraha' but a 'hutagraha' (an act of obstinacy) by attempting to stop the project on which the government had already spent about Rs 1,000 crore. "His attitude is very unGandhian," he said.

He made it clear that the government, under no circumstances, would compromise on the height of the dam, pace of the construction work or review the feasibility and need of the project.

"We are prepared to negotiate with the agitators on the ecological or environmental aspect of the project or the problems of rehabilitation of the displaced persons but it is too late in the day to discuss the need for big dams. There are already 2,000 big dams in the world and one more is not going to create any crisis," Mr Patel said.

He claimed that the rehabilitation package provided by the Gujarat government was one of the best in that it not only gave land for land but also provided five acres additional land to each of the landless labourers, who were displaced. He said that the concessions and subsidies given by the Gujarat government were more liberal than those given by any other state government to project-affected persons.

He refuted the reports that the Prime Minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar, had given an assurance that the government would undertake a fresh review of the project and added that the Narmada project was one of the most thoroughly scrutinised projects in the country since independence. He felt that this project would be a true savier for the state.

The World Bank is committed to provide funds for the project and the work on various sites is in progress. We shall not allow Baba to take a morcha and demolish the dam. If a group of persons enter Maharashtra and try to demolish the Mantralaya, would you allow it? The people of Gujarat have extended their wholehearted support to the project and there are no differences among the politicians in Gujarat over the need for completion of the project," the Chief Minister said.

When asked why the Gujarat government failed to arrest the BJP president Mr L. K. Advani, when he commenced his 'Rathayatra' from Somnath, Mr Patel said that the then prime minister, Mr V. P. Singh had assured him that the Babri Masjid-Ramajanmabhoomi tangle would be sorted out before the 'Yatra' would reach Ayodhya, "but it turned out to be an error of judgement." He said that what weighed with the Union government was that the BJP was also the alliance partner at the Centre.

Economic Times 8 Jan, 1991

# 7 anti-dam activists on fast

FERKUVA, Jan 7. — Narmada Bachao Andolan leaders today launched an indefinite fast, signalling further intensification of their agitation against the multi-purpose Narmada project, reports PTI.

Seven representatives from the anti-Narmada rally led by Ms Medha Patkar began the fast at their camp on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border on the 14th day of their anti-Dam march, demanding review of the project.

Social activist Baba Amte, who is steering the march, continued his dharna for the third day today near here to pressure the Gujarat Government to allow the march to proceed to the Dam site to stag a "satyagraha".

Earlier, Baba Amte fainted due to weakness and hypertension.

Statesman 8-1-91

Talking to reporters, Ms Patkar said the Government had not taken any initiative for a dialogue and added that they were prepared for a public debate on the issue.

See editorial: Not Giving a Dam

In a letter to the Prime Minister, she said the Andolan was left with no option but to undertake an indefinite fast as Mr Chandra Shekhar had "failed" to persuade the Governments concerned to agree to a review of the project.

Dwelling on the "basic anomalies" in the conception and decisions about the project, she demanded a complete review of the project from human, environmental, economic, financial and developmental aspects. Till then, irreversible works like land acquisition should be stopped, she said.

Meanwhile, the veteran Sarvodaya leader, Mr Siddha Raj Dhaddha, has requested the Gujarat Government not to insist on proceeding with the Narmada Sarovar Dam Project and said "big dams do not solve any problem."

In a telegram to the Gujarat Minister for Narmada Project, Mr Babu Bhai Patel, Mr Dhaddha said the Government should not make the construction of Narmada Dam a "prestige issue."

He said the big dams created several environment and human problems instead of solving any difficulty.

Independent 9 Jan, 91

# Dal workers manhandle anti-Narmada women

(Independent, 9 JAN, 1991)

Nachiketa Desai
in Ahmedabad

WOMEN SOCIAL activists staging a dharna against the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) here were manhandled, leered, and jeered at by Yuva Janata Dal workers here on Monday, while the police looked on silently.

Inspector L H Desai rained lathi-blows on an anti-dam demonstrator asking for police protection who had already been assaulted by the rowdy Yuva Janata workers and had fallen on a barbed wire fence.

A crowd of Yuva Janata workers had gathered at Lal Darwaja much before the scheduled time of the anti-dam dharna. The Yuva Janata workers, who had not sought police permission to hold a counter-demonstration, performed a mock operation of eminent social worker Baba Amte's brain "to remove evil ideas against the dam."

When the anti-dam activists, including several women, arrived there to stage their dharna, they were mobbed by the Yuva Janata workers who showered rotten tomatos at them. The latter snatched away all the anti-dam posters and placards and pushed around the women activists while shouting the foulest of abuses at them.

When the anti-dam activists sought police protection, they were advised to disperse quietly. The activists were chased and beaten up by the Yuva Janata workers in the presence of the police.

Even as a woman activist was preparing to leave on her Moped, she was mobbed by the Yuva Janata workers and manhandled.

The Yuva Janata mob included municipal councillor Rohit Patel and several office-bearers of the state Janata Dal.

The anti-dam movement received support from an unexpected quarter when the Gujarat Sarvodaya Mandal, through a resolution, condemned the Chimanbhai Patel government's offensive stand towards Baba Amte, Medha Patkar and other leaders of the anti-dam agitation.

At the same time, the Sarvodaya Mandal suggested that the anti-dam agitators undertake a mass awakening campaign in Gujarat to explain their position before taking the extreme step of offering a satyagraha at the Sardar Sarovar dam site.

The mandal felt the necessity of educating the people of Gujarat about the evils of big dams and mega-projects like the SSP before undertaking any agitational programme because of the frenzy generated through the media blitz in favour of the project.

Even as the indefinite fast by seven anti-dam activists led by Medha Patkar and the dharna-unto-death by Baba Amte continued at Ferkuva, Gujarat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel made it clear to his cabinet colleagues that he was in no mood to initiate a dialogue with those opposed to the SSP.

**FERKUVA (PTI):** Gujarat minister for Narmada development Babubhai Patel yesterday ruled out the possibility of reviewing the SSP as demanded by the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Talking to reporters after meeting Baba Amte near Bhudra river bridge on Monday, Patel told reporters that the dam's opponents should realise that the project was "Gujarat's lifeline."

However, the state government "has an open mind about issues like the rehabilitation of oustees," he said.

Meanwhile, the Gujarat government has filed a caveat in the state high court at Ahmedabad stating that the court refrain from passing any order on any matter concerning implementation of the SSP.

The caveat was filed on Monday as the anti-Narmada project agitators and followers of Baba Amte have reportedly threatened to file a writ petition to bring pressure upon the state government to halt work on the dam, official sources said.

**AHMEDABAD (UNI):** The Gujarat high court on Tuesday directed the state government to produce before the court on Wednesday all the relevant documents regarding the whereabouts of the seven anti-Narmada activists, arrested by the Rangpur police station of Baroda district on inter-state border neighbouring Madhya Pradesh on January 4.

The habeas corpus application filed on behalf of the seven activists, by the Jansangharsha Manch of Ahmedabad before the division bench, comprising chief justice A N Ray and justice S B Mazumdar, has alleged that they were detained illegally.

The special criminal application has also demanded that the activists, whose names were given as Dayabhai, Bhogilal, Kashiram, Motiram, Pritam, Dashrath Singh and Rajkumar, be produced before the court.

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# An upset Amte says no won't give up mission

From Ashok Vyas

FERKUVA, Jan. 8

Ferkuva is a small hamlet on the border of the west coast States of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Till December 31, this place, inhabited by 1,000 plus people, was unknown like thousands of similar hamlets dotted across the country.

However, since December 31 things have dramatiçally changed for Ferkuva which has come to be known nationally and perhaps internationally. For, on this day Baba Amte, who started his march from Badwani on December 25 along with some 1,150 volunteers tried to cross over into Gujarat on way to Kevadia colony to stop the work on the Sardar Sarovar Narmada project.

Baba Amte is leading a group of anti-dam protestors from Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. They have been camping opposite this hamlet on the Madhya Pradesh side since Monday last wanting to move to Kevadia. Police barricade and the prohibitory orders apart, there are hundreds of supporters of the Narmada dam who have created what they described as a human wall of the people of Gujarat to prevent the Narmada Bachao Andolan activists from crossing over into Gujarat.

This correspondent visited Ferkuva on Monday and found the Narmada Bachao Andolan activists squatting on the Madhya Pradesh side of the border and the supporters of the Narmada dam led by Mrs Urmila Patel, wife of Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel, and chairman of Women's Action Group, a voluntary organisation, squatting just about ten metres short of the bridge on the Gujarat side.

On both sides tents and shamianas have been erected and chanting of bhajans, speeches and slogans filled the air along with dust, from dry and barren fields.

Just about 15 metres inside the Gujarat territory stands an ambulance which has been turned into Baba Amte's headquarters and resting place. Part of the ambulance has been converted into a bed and the rear half into a sort of office-cum-medical place. Baba Amte lay reclining on a pillow as the slanting rays of the setting sun filtered in from the window and fell on his face.

Baba Amte, who had fainted on Sunday due to what he and some of his supporters described as "tension" created by the continuous shouting of slogans and singing of bhajans at a high pitch by the supporters of the Narmada dam, looked cheerful.

Former Chief Minister and presently a Cabinet Minister exclusively for the Narmada project Babubhai Patel had met him in the morning to enquire about his health. Mr Patel had met and held the first round of talks on December 31.

From the conversation that this correspondent had with Baba Amte, and Mrs Medha Patkar, who embarked on an indefinite fast from Monday along with seven others, including three women, a next to total deadlock pre-

vails with neither the Narmada Bachao Andolan activists nor the supporters of the Narmada Dam wanting to budge from their respective stands.

Baba Amte told this correspondent that "I am not going back from Gujarat. It is possible that what I may not achieve while alive will be achieved after my death. Then, it is also possible that what I have not been able to convey to the people of Gujarat and convince them while alive my death will do."

Baba Amte is hurt by what he described as "the callousness which the people have shown to me. I was on my way to offer satyagrah and the authorities just put women homeguards and police on the way. Then slogans like 'Baba Amte ko wapas bejo, Gujarat bachao (Send baba Amte back and save Gujarat) have hurt. Have I come here to conquer Gujarat?" he asked and added that because of this and the fact that there were cheers when he fainted "I have no wish to live. May be I will move out of this ambulance and sit in the open."

Mrs Patkar, who started her indefinite fast, told this correspondent that they had placed all their proposals before the Central Government and concerned State Governments and till these are accepted there was no question of either her giving up the fast or withdrawing the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Asked as to what were the proposals, she said that there should be an investigation of the entire project by the Ministries of Social Welfare, Finance, Irrigation and Water and Power Resources and Environment who should be part of a new committee which should also include the representatives of the Governments of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat, their representatives and some neutral experts acceptable to both sides.

When her attention was drawn to the fact that this was one of the most investigated projects in the country and the fact that the World Bank had given its clearance after going through all the aspects, Mrs Patkar said that the investigations were not thorough and the benefit has been highly exaggerated. She also dismissed the World Bank's clearance stating that it was based on the data and details supplied by the Indian Central Government and State Governments. She added that though the World Bank described itself as an institution for reconstruction and development but the point that it is a money-lending body should not be missed. It is lending money and taking interest.

Asked whether there could be any meeting point which could break this impasse like the revision of the number of the project affected people and the like Mrs Patkar said "It is not the question of numbers only. It is the question of distributive justice."

When her attention was drawn to the fact that some fear that stopping of the Narmada project now would mean bigger multi purpose projects in the country, Mrs Patkar said that "we are not only against the huge irrigation project but [illegible]

which result in the displacement of people. Why should certain things be produced by mega project which could be used by say five or ten per cent of the population? Where was distributive justice in this? The whole theory of percolation of the benefits has collapsed."

Asked as to why Baba Amte had refused any medical help from the Government of Gujarat, one activist said that this was in protest against the manner in which the Government had reacted to the hitherto peaceful and non-violent andolan.

It was made clear to this correspondent that Mr Babubhai Patel, Minister for Narmada project, at no time discussed the agitation with either Baba Amte or for that matter with any one else. He had come to enquire about the Baba's health.

Mr Patel, after his meeting with Baba Amte, reiterated the Government's stand that there was no question whatsoever for reviewing the project which had been investigated and re-investigated thoroughly over the last 30 years or so. "I have taken over the Ministry with the one and only purpose of expediting the project and results are coming in from the time that I have been made incharge," he added.

Independent 10 Jan. 1991

## 'Anti-dam men not detained'

AHMEDABAD (PTI)

The chief public prosecutor, Gujarat, yesterday filed an affidavit before the high court, stating that all the seven anti-dam activists arrested on the MP-Gujarat border by the Baroda police on January 4, were produced before the Chhota Udepur executive magistrate within the stipulated period and not illegally detained.

The state government contended that the executive magistrate had already passed an order releasing them on personal bonds on January 5.

# Gujarat CM rules out talks

From Our Special Correspondent 9/1/91

GANDHINAGAR, Jan 8. — A high-level meeting presided over by the Chief Minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, today ruled out any negotiations on the demand of anti-dam agitators for lowering the dam's height and stopping construction work for the time being.

The meeting which was also attended by the Finance Minister, Mr Chhabildas Mehta, the Minister for Narmada Development, Mr Babubhai Patel, and senior officials opted for a stalemate at Ferkuva, the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border where pro-dam and anti-dam demonstrators are fighting a war of nerves.

Even the illness of Baba Amte and Ms Medha Patkar, the Narmada Bachao Andolan leaders would not deter the Government from changing its stance, the Chief Minister said categorically.

Meanwhile, the Sarvodaya Mandal comprising Gandhian social workers like Mr Kantibhai Shah and Mr Jagdish Shah yesterday resolved to support the anti-dam movement and facilitate the entry of Baba and his followers in Gujarat.

UNI adds: Five more Narmada Bachao Andolan activists joined the "fast unto death" started yesterday by seven Andolan volunteers, included Ms Medha Patkar, while a two-member commission representing non-governmental organizations in Delhi reached Ferkuva on a fact-finding mission.

The two-member commission, comprising a representative from the national campaign for housing rights and another from the national fishermen's forum would investigate alleged human rights violations. The members will be here for the next two days during which period it will visit both the pro and anti-Sardar Sarovar Project camps. It will submit its reports on returning to the Capital, an Andolan spokesperson said.

PTI adds: "I am fighting for a cause and I cannot call off the march", Baba Amte told a delegation of school children from various parts of Gujarat, who traversed 30 km on foot from Chota Udepur to Ferkuva for beseeching him to abandon the anti-Narmada project march "in the interest of the nation".

Baba Amte said he was acting only according to "the will of the people affected by the project and had not made it a prestige issue".

# Anti-dam activists have moral edge

(TIMES OF INDIA, JAN 9, 1991)

By HARISH KHARE

AHMEDABAD, Jan. 8.

NOTWITHSTANDING the shrill rhetoric and the often disgraceful tactics deployed by the Narmada project establishment at Ferkuva, it is obvious that Baba Amte and his fellow-rallyists have managed to show up the Gujarat government in a rather uncomplimentary light, both in the national media as well as the international press.

The chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, and his advisers, both official and unofficial, are entitled to their views that the national media's refusal to see the Narmada project as a panacea for all the ills of Gujarat is an indication of its prejudices against the state.

But after days of stand-off on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border, it is becoming increasingly clear that the chief minister will have to come up with imaginative responses to seize the moral initiative. And the sooner this is realised the better.

In a way, the chief minister is the victim of his own brand of over-management. While out of power, he was quick enough to realise the emotive potential of this controversy and, once in power, he characteristically saw no reason to moderate his voice. None of his advisers felt the need to point out to him that churning up parochial passions in the vernacular press does not always impress policy-makers, be it in New Delhi, Washington or Tokyo.

Mr Chimanbhai Patel has unwittingly whipped up a frenzy over the Narmada issue, aided and abetted by the vast resources of the information department — which have not necessarily been always spent legally — to create an impression that Baba Amte and his fellow-rallyists are bent upon bringing to a grinding halt the work on the Narmada project.

These deliberate manipulations of popular emotions did help the chief minister to cope, politically first, with the problems created by Messrs Praveensinh Jadeja and Jaspal Singh, and later helped him dampen the ardour of mischief-makers on both sides of the communal divide.

But now, having demonstrated to the world that the people of Gujarat are solidly behind the Narmada project, he can afford to change gears. As it is, the very presence of his wife on the Bhadar bridge, exhorting the pro-dam rallyists, who at times have lapsed into tastelessness, does not bring credit to Mr Chimanbhai Patel.

Despite the eulogies received at home, his national reputation stands considerably damaged. He appears as a politician no less uncouth than Mr Om Prakash Chautala.

Baba Amte's dharna and fast can now be used as an opportunity by the chief minister to find an honourable end to the confrontation that no longer serves Mr Patel's interests, It would be a magnificant gesture on the chief minister's part to permit the anti-Narmada marchers to go all the way to Kevadia Colony.

The refusal to let the Amte rallyists have the satisfaction of their people-to-people dialogue is at odds with the portrayal of the SSP as the life-line of Gujarat.

Admittedly, the anti-dam rallyists would want to break the law, if permitted to proceed, albeit non-violently, in Kevadia. But then they will have to earn the stigma of wanting to take liberties with law and order. As of now, this confrontation on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border is taking the look of David and Goliath. The over-bearing and intolerant approach has only given the advantage of moral edge to the environmentalists.

It would be entirely consistent with Gujarat's traditions if the chief minister were to personally invite Baba Amte to give up his fast-cum-dharna and to invite him to travel to Kevadia Colony to see for himself the kind of rehabilitation work the state has already undertaken.

Baba Amte is sorely testing the limits of Mr Chimanbhai Patel's legendary gift for pragmatism.

Meanwhile the Andolan leader, Ms Medha Patkar, today challenged the Gujarat Chief Minister to prove the allegation that anti-Narmada movement was funded by foreign agencies.

She told reporters at the site of dharna that these type of allegations were levelled by politicians against the agitation from the day it was launched but so far nobody had been able to prove it since it had the support of poor farmers and Adivasis.

The Times of India. 9 Jan, 91

BABA AMTE
NARMADA LOK-BIRADARI
At Post: Kasaravad
Via: Badwani - Pin 451 551
Dist: Khargon, Madhya Pradesh. India.
9.1.91

Decision to stay was mine

In some sections of the Press (e.g. Sandesh, Jan 7, 1991), it has been alleged that the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra leaders are 'playing with Baba's health' to suit their own ends, by not allowing doctors to take me to Baroda for admission in an ICU. This allegation, like previous ones about an imaginary split between me and the Narmada Bachao Andolan, is false and mischievous.

The truth is that, after I regained consciousness following my fall on January 6th, I myself refused to be moved to a hospital. For a man who has sworn not to move out of Gujarat unless the legitimate voice of the people of Narmada Valley is heard, it would be unthinkable to agree to being shifted even if failing health required it. I specifically told the Andolan members who were present, that I was not to be moved out even if I fell unconscious again.

That apart, the doctors accompanying the Yatra, Dr. Rajiv Lochan Sharma, confirmed very soon after my fall that there was no immediate cause for hospitalisation. My personal physician, Dr. Prakash Yadav of Badwani, also felt the same when he examined me early next morning. He prescribed some drugs, which I am regularly taking.

It does no good to the image of the Press if it continues to publish such baseless allegations. I would wish that it focuses more on the substantive issues raised by our Yatra, rather than waste newsprint trying to denigrate the Andolan.

# Amte to return national awards

Indep
10.1.91

ALIRAJPUR (MP) (PTI) Social activist Baba Amte yesterday decided to return the 'Padmashri' and 'Padma Vibhushan' awards to the president on January 26 in protest against what he called the "inhuman treatment meted out to the anti-dam tribals and himself by the Gujarat government."

Amte announced this at Ferkuva village where he is staging a dharna along with a group of tribals.

"My belief in peace and justice forces me to take this decision," he said, adding that by ignoring the tribals' march and plight and treating them and himself inhumanly, the Gujarat and central governments had made a mockery of the awards given to him.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan leaders are mobilising more tribals from the SSP-affected villages of Khargaon, Dhar and Jhabua district to join their counterparts even as the indefinite fast by seven activists including Medha Patkar entered the third day yesterday.

Andolan leader Girish Patel told newsmen in Indore that the Andolan would approach the supreme court to restore the right to life of tribals agitating in Gujarat as guaranteed under the constitution.

He said the anti-dam tribals had a right to demand a comprehensive and honest review of the Sardar Sarovar project and agitate peacefully. The stir will continue till the Andolan achieves its objectives, he said.

Patel said there was no rift among the leaders on the issue of continuing the agitation and said all decisions were taken in consultation with Amte and other leaders now camping near Chandpur village.

He said the Andolan leaders wanted to know from the government what were its plan for the rehabilitation of tribals, plan for catchment area treatment, command area development plan, preservation of flora and fauna, compensatory aspect to the tribals, and plan to avert disaster like an earthquake.

Unless the government answered these questions already raised by the World Bank, it should stop construction of the dam for three months and hold a dialogue with the anti-dam leaders during the period.

Patel alleged that the government had not conducted any study on the major points raised by the Andolan and had taken the people of Gujarat for a ride.

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Sunderlal Patwa told newsmen at Kukdeswar near Mandsaur on Tuesday that the Narmada river was untouched by any irrigation project so far and the anti-dam agitation "had no meaning."

He said Amte specialised in serving leporasy patients, Swami Agnivesh in the field of bonded labour and Medha Patkar was a teacher. "How can they decide the height of the dam," he asked.

This job was better left to the specialists and experts in the field, he said, adding the decision to implement the project was taken after 30 years of deliberations by experts.

"I and thousands of tribals and peasants of the Narmada Valley have been lying by the roadside for the last several days. Confronted by the might of a callous and indifferent State. Today is the fifteenth day of the Jan Vikas Sangharsha Yatra, which we have undertaken to press our demand to review the Sardar Sarovar project. This Yatra is a symbolic struggle against inhuman and destructive development, which has resulted in ecological plunder everywhere in India. Its neglect by the state and Central governments reflects their insensitivity to the right to life and livelihood of tribals and peasants everywhere. This corrosive damage to our nation, which has a rich heritage of history with a human face, has greatly saddened me.

I have, in the past, been conferred several national awards by the government of India. The callousness with which I and my fellow yatris have been treated in the last few days makes a mockery of these. My passion for justice and peace has forced me to take the painful decision to return these awards, that is, the Padma Shree and the Padma Vibhushan, on January 26, 1991. This nation can no longer remain a silent spectator of the immolation of its sufferers."

*Baba Amte*

Illustrated Weekly

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Ferkuwa, M.P.-Gujarat border.
10-1-1991

Renowned Activists Jyotibhai Desai, Madhusudan Mistry and Harshad Desai Visit the Camp

Jyotibai Desai, veteran Gandhian and educationist, and Madhusudan Mistry noted social worker among the tribals in Gujarat visited the camp of Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra on Wednesday (9th) and pledged their support to the cause of Narmada Bachao Andolan. They, along with Prof. Harshad Desai, renowned thinker in Gujarat, expressed their solidarity for the movement which struggles for the rights of the downtrodden and for the cause of alternative model of development.

Jyotibhai Desai has been consistently advocating the Gandhian model of development and has been an unflagging supporter of the Andolan. Yesterday, he expressed his conviction in the meeting at the camp by raising the slogan of 'koi nahin hatega-baandh nahin banega'. Prof. Harshad Desai said that there had been a clear polarisation on the Narmada issue. Those who are opposing the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the issues raised by it have been opposing all the struggles of the oppressed in Gujarat for long. The same forces who are involved in anti-Sangharsh Yatra mobilisation, were in the forefront in suppressing the Dalits in Anti-Reservation stir and anti-minority hysteria and anti-Mandal Commission stir in the state. He expressed sense of guilt on behalf of all thinking Gujarati people.

It was a touching sight when over thirty activists from the tribal belt of Panchmahal and Sabarkantha in Gujarat marched in expressing support to the Sangharsh Yatra. Led by noted social worker Madhusudan Mistry all of them hailed from 'Disha' organisation. Speaking at the camp Mr. Mistry expressed his confidence that the flame lit by the Narmada Bachao Andolan will light all other struggles of the depressed classes even in Gujarat. He decried the fascist tendencies in the state and explained how pro-people organisations in the state are feeling suffocated. He was confident that slowly but definitely the people in Gujarat will realise the truth and come on the side of the Andolan. However he was dismayed over the trend of non-governmental organisations supporting the state to crush the people's movement.

# PRESS RELEASE

## (BASED ON THE PRELIMINARY REPORT ON CURRENT NARMADA CONFRONTATION

The National Campaign for Housing Rights(NCHR) and the National Fishermen's Forum (NFF) jointly undertook a one day fact-finding mission to the site of the current Narmada confrontation on 8th January and placed their preliminary findings at a Press Conference held on 10th January at the Press Club at 3.30 pm.

The spokespersons clarified that at a meeting in Delhi, it was decided that their organisations being independent of the situation in the Narmada Valley should undertake the mission to the Gujarat/Madhya Pradesh border to observe and to make available for the groups and people's movements all over the country, an objective report on the situation.

Jai Sen of NCHR and J.John of NFF said that they found the camp of the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra to be highly inspiring, but they were left mostly very disturbed by the situation in the Gujarat side of the confrontation. The impression that they gathered was that the so-called 'pro-dam rally' that has assembled, is an artificial one made up of people who have been heavily misguided by the false information given out by the government of Gujarat and the Gujarathi press, brought to the site especially to 'demonstrate'. They found the 'pro-dam rallyists' outbursts chauvanistic, hysterical and irrational.

On the other hand, the members of the fact-finding team reported that they were deeply impressed by the state of Sangharsh Yatra in an overall situation which resembles a battle field in a war, with the two fronts arrayed on the two sides of the border. They reported that over 1000 Yatrees still remain camping in an open field at Farakua, Jhabua district, Madhya Pradesh, very close to the Gujarat border. They said, all the Yatrees were keeping high morale and their fighting spirit not dampened by the inclement weather. They found the seven on indefinite fast including Smt.Medha Patkar, and the twenty in the 'advance team' who have entered Gujarat and camp just before the guarded bridge, including Baba Amte, to be well and overflowing with self-confidence and conviction. The members were very impressed by the high efficient organisation of the camp including the supply lines of food, medicines and communication. They found that all of these are being done on a purely voluntary basis and with support from locals on both sides of the border.

The members of the fact-finding team said, they were appalled at the naked use of state machinery by the Gujarat government aimed at demoralising intimidating and obstructing the Sangharsh Yatra from their resolve to cross the Gujarat border and to reach the controversial Sardar Sarovar dam site. The Chief Minister himself addressed the state managed pro-dam rally on 30th and thousands of the policemen were deployed across the border. They held it suspicious, the manner in which the so-called pro-dam agitation is sustained keeping Narmada Foundation Trust acting as a front and with the active participation of Gujarat Chamber of Commerce.The participation of anti-social elements in the on-going agitation on the Gujarati side of the border, led by the wife of Gujarati Chief Minister, was confirmed by the Baroda district Collector. The use of Section 144 in a partisan manner where peaceful Yatrees with their hands tied were prevented from crossing the border, but where the Gujarat rallyists 'managed to get across' was also found to be highly questionable. The fact-finding mission questioned the introduction and active use of sectarian and religious elements like the Swami Narayan sect, in a highly sensitive situation. They observed that the Gujarat Government is not only engaged in a hysteric campaign in favour of Sardar Sarovar Project, but also in gross distortions of facts about the Sangharsh Yatra. The Chauvanistic and proto-fascist maneouverings of the Gujarat government, they said, effectively silences any public debate in Gujarat and

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help maintain a sustained mental violence. They recalled the incident in which donkeys were paraded in front of Advocate Girish Patel's house in Ahmedabad and his effigiees burnt, for his active participation in the Sangharsh Yatra. When the state usurps the right of citizens in civil society, it points to the death of democracy, they said. They agreed with Baba Amte's statement that "when the governments stoops to pitting people against people, it is highly dangerous for everyone". Moreover, the team members were disturbed by the fact that the Gujarathi press, especially Sandesh, Gujarat Samacar and Lok Satta, have joined the pro-dam bandwagon in the distortion of facts and character assassination and vilification of Sangharsh Yatra leaders.

The members of the fact-finding mission held deplorable the unwarranted as well as differential applicaton of law in the border by the Gujarat administration. They said altogether 14 Sangharsh Yatrees were arrested, 7 held in judicial custody in Chotaudepur and the other seven under preventive custody in Baroda. The information from the Collector that where as the first seven have been held for substantive offences (under Cr.PC 143, 147, 148,188,332,426 etc.) and the others under Cr.PC 151, the 65 from the pro-dam rallyists were just picked up and released under Bombay Police Act 68 shows the partiality of the law enforcing agencies, they said. In the case of 140 Sangharsh Yatrees including women and children who were picked up on January 4, were let off at night at far off places, misusing the provisions under Bombay Police Act, 142. Moreover, on January 4, the Yatrees who entered the Gujarat border were manhandled and lathi charged by the Gujarat police twice, first when they were marching with the hands tied and for the second time when they were taking food in the evening, the members said.

The fact-finding mission left deeply disturbed by the sustained actions and behaviour of Gujarat government which appears to be acting like a government that is scared and also by the central government which appear to have lost ability to perceive the right and the wrong.

The mission felt that the Narmada Bachao Andolan has over the past years, raised a wide range of social questions - the rights of tribals and the deprived, about equality, environment and planning. The Sangharsh Yatra has now taken this to an even higher level, giving it deeper political and democratic content. But the mission was forced to conclude that the Indian state by its reaction so far in this matter, seems to prefer to forclose its options, prefering as it has done, money power and brute politics. The Sangharsh Yatra instead of retaliating at the same level, has chosen to take the matter to a qualitatively different moral plane, as Smt.Medha Patkar has written to the Prime Minister. The indefinite hunder fast launched on 7th January by seven Yatrees including Ms.Medha Patkar and two other women is symptomatic of the superior moral strength of the Sangharsh Yatrees. The Satyagrahees demand a full review of of the controversial project with the stoppage of all irreversible work on the dam. Mission further learned from Baba Amte that he has decided, in a further act of protest against the behaviour of the state, to return on Republic Day, the various awards bestowed on him by the nation, among them the Padmashree and the Padmabhusan. Baba Amte also wondered why he was not being arrested, and said that he would not retreat an inch, but would prefer to 'die here on the dusty roads of Gujarat'.

It is thus clearly, the government that will be responsible for any untoward consequences of the idefinite fast. Nor does the mission believe that the arrest and removal of the camp, which is widely expected, is any solution.

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The Yatrees indicated to the mission that they are still open to discussions at any level so that the Sardar Sarovar Project is subjected to a comprehensive review and all irreversible work onthe dam is immediately stopped. The Gujarat Government is adament in its position that no discussion will be entertained on a review of the project, on reduction of the height of the dam nor on the stoppage of work on the dam. The barely-concealed role of Gujarat government in instigating the pro-Narmada dam agitations, leave it with no political or moral credibility to intervene in the situation. The fact-finding team members tend to support the Sangharsh Yatrees and the Baroda district Collector's opinion that the stalemate can be broken only by the immediate intervention of the Prime Minister or of the Supreme Court.

On the basis of the above, the mission also concluded that there is no doubt that the moral authority in the present confrontation now lies with the Narmada Bachao Andolan and that it is its duty to recommend to its member organisations and to the public in general to openly support the Andolan's demands. Mission also proposes to recommend a series of supportive actions, so as to widen the front of protest, demand and action. The members said that they believed that the Narmada confrontation has today become a symbol for all in our country, who are concerned about development, social justice and democracy and that the actions in the coming weeks will have lasting implications for the future.

Jai Sen
National Campaign for Housing Rights

J.John
Representative of Chairperson, National Fishermen's Forum

Place:New Delhi
Date: 11/1/1991.

Names of the Sangharsh Yatrees on Indefinite Hunger Fast since 7.1.1991

1. Medha Patkar
2. Shanti Bai of Pipri
3. Laxmi Bai of Piplud
4. Devram Bhai of Kadmal
5. Mathur Mohan of Sindori
6. Khaja Gauslya of Savria
7. Meghnath of Bihar.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Ferkuwa, M.P.-Gujarat border
Press Release
12.1.1991

Major Valley Towns Observe Bandh In Support of the Yatra and Fast

As the indefinite hunger strike against the Sardar Sarovar Project by seven representatives led by Smt. Medha Patkar entered the sixth day, major towns and villages in the project-affected area called for a 'bandh' in support of the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra and the hunger strike. Major commercial towns like Badwani, Anjad (Dist. Khargone) and Kukshi, Manawar, Susari (Dist. Dhar) were closed and all commercial activities were suspended. Major villages like Chikhalda, Kadmal and Bhavanriya too were closed.

A vehicle rally proceeded from Nisarpur to Kukshi where the marchers handed over a letter to the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh through the sub-divisional magistrate of Kukshi. The citizens of Kukshi tehsil thereby appealed to the C.M. to be true to his assurances and start a dialogue with the Andolan for the review of the project. They decried the undemocratic methods adopted by the Government of Gujarat with the connivance of the local language press and some opportunistic non-governmental organizations. However, the behaviour of the M.P. Government too is not very different as it is bent on abusing the very activists and its own citizens who are trying to save the people, resources and environment of the state.

Meanwhile, a relay hunger strike is going on for the last three days in Delhi by the tribal representatives and the supporters of the Narmada Bachao Andolan in the metropolis in front of the Shram Shakti Bhavan. In Bombay, over forty prominent personalities have sent telegrams to the Prime Minister to review the entire project with the participation of the anti-dam people's organization and stop the irreversible work on the dam till such a review is complete. They include noted playwright Vijay Tendulkar, respected trade unionist Bagaram Tulpule, actress Shabna Azmi, Dr A.R. Desai, director Govind Nihalani, environmentalist Bittu Sahgal.

Meanwhile, the indefinite hunger strike by Medha Patkar and six other representatives continued for the sixth day, while five more relay people joined the relay hunger strike. 'This is the testing time for our polity, we are seeing how these forces react to the challenge of the need for an alternative development model', Smt. Patkar said.

# Narmada activists move court

( TIMES OF INDIA, 12 JAN, 91 )

The Times of India News Service

AHMEDABAD, January 11.

MS Medha Patkar of the Narmada bachao andolan has filed a writ petition in the Gujarat high court challenging the action of the chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, and the state government in preventing some 3,500 andolan volunteers from entering Gujarat.

Ms Patkar, Baba Amte and hundreds of people from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, who set out for Kevadia in Gujarat from Raj Ghat (MP) on December 25, have been camping only few km away from the inter-state boundary for the past 11 days. The boundary is being heavily guarded by the armed police force which has already arrested several members of the andolan who tried to enter Gujarat.

In her petition, Ms Patkar has contended that she and others had been prevented not only from entering the state but also from expressing their views regarding the disastrous consequences of the Sardar Sarovar project. The state government had on January 7 filed a caveat application in matters concerning the implementation of the Sardar Sarovar project. Accordingly, a copy of Ms Patkar's petition was served on the government pleader today.

She alleged that Mr Chimanbhai Patel had himself instigated the people of Gujarat to stop the entry of the satyagrahis. She accused the chief minister of making fiery and provocative speeches at Chhota Udepur and of using the state machinery to prevent the satyagrahis from entering the state. She further pointed out that the satyagrahis were being treated as "alien invaders." The Gujarat government's approach has been against the federal structure and unity of the country.

Ms Patkar argued that promulgating prohibitory orders at Ferkuva village on the inter-state boundary was unconstitutional and ultra vires.

The petition is likely to be taken up for hearing on January 15.

Meanwhile, a group of voluntary organisations here, while demanding a total review of the project and consideration of alternatives, have called for an immediate dialogue between the anti-dam satyagrahis and the people of Gujarat.

Addressing a press conference today, Mr Vijay Paranjpye of Parisar, reiterated the environmentalists' demand to identify adequate land for the rehabilitation of the displaced people. He also called for the immediate stoppage of construction work which was irreversible.

Mr Paranjpye dismissed the propaganda being made by the Gujarat government that anti-dam people had adopted an extreme and adamant stand on the issue. Referring to the slogan that the Sardar Sarovar Project was the "life-line of Gujarat". He pointed out with the help of maps that the command area of the project covered only fertile areas like Ahmedabad, Baroda, Kheda and Surendranagar, which had the highest per capita income in the country. The areas of Kutch, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Junagadh and Amreli would not benefit from the project, Mr Paranjpye said.

## Narmada activists' condition worsen

The Times of India News Service

INDORE, January 11: The health condition of Ms Medha Patkar and six others, who are on indefinite hunger-strike, was today stated to be deteriorating.

In a statement from Ferkuva, where the activists of Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra had entered the 17th day of their agitation today, the Narmada Bachao Andolan spokesman held Madhya Pradesh government equally responsible for sidetracking the problems of the affected people.

He said the chief minister, Mr Sunderlal Patwa, and his government had ignored, in principle, the justice to the people and had failed to discharge its duties.

# Bandh observed in Narmada valley

( INDEPENDENT, 13 JAN, 1991 )

ALIRAJPUR (PTI)

A complete bandh was observed in the Narmada valley areas in Madhya Pradesh in support of the indefinite hunger-strike undertaken by the leaders of the anti-dam agitators including Medha Patkar near Chandpur village on the inter-state border yesterday.

Bandh was observed in Badwani, Kukshi, Anjad and Manavar, while small traders downed shutters in Chilinda, Kadmal, Bhavaria, Susari and other villages where processions were taken out in support of the agitation.

In Dhar district, a motorcyclists' rally was taken out from Nisarpur to Kukshi where a memorandum addressed to Madhya Pradesh chief minister Sunderlal Patwa was handed over to the district authorities.

Meanwhile, the indefinite hunger-strike by Medha Patkar and six other Andolan leaders entered the sixth day yesterday.

CPI MP Rameshwarprasad Sinh and a supreme court lawyer, Venkat Ramani, yesterday visited the anti-dam marchers now camping near Chandpur village, an Andolan release said.

**FERKUVA:** Andolan leaders yesterday expressed their readiness for "unconditional" talks with the Gujarat government to help end the impasse, but insisted that the talks be held only with the Gujarat chief secretary or chief minister Chimanbhai Patel.

Stating this, Andolan spokesman Ashish Kothari, however made it abundantly clear that the Jan Vikas Sangarsh Yatra would continue till the government agreed to their demand for a review of the Sardar Sarovar Project.

Girishbhai Patel, an Andolan leader, said that they had filed a complaint with the Press Council of India against two Gujarat newspapers and the state information department for what they called violation of journalistic ethics and guidelines by the Press Commission.

**AHMEDABAD (UNI):** Former test player Surinder Amarnath and off spinner Uday Joshi will lead the state youths in the 'Run for Narmada' on January 19 organised by the Gujarat unit of the Yuva Janata Dal.

Dr Mrugesh Vaishnav, president of the state unit of the Dal said that prominent citizens, sportsmen, lawyers and doctors would participate in the run aimed at mobilising public opinion against the anti-Narmada dam agitators led by Baba Amte.

Times of India 12 Jan, 91

Independent 13 Jan, 91

# Narmada degenerates into a deadlock

Illustrated Weekly, 12/3/91

● HARISH KHARE

In Ahmedabad

Despite an apparent effort by some senior officials within the Gujarat government to find a way out of the stand-off at Ferkuva, the hawks and the vultures on both sides will see to it that the stalemate degenerates into a deadlock. Neither of the antagonists is prepared to observe one fundamental rule of any successful negotiation. Namely, that the other side should not be seen as having been cornered and that it should be allowed to have an honourable route of escape.

It is an unequal battle at Ferkuva. The intrepid anti-dam rallyists have nothing except their determination and Baba's moral stature to make their point. The pro-dam forces are meticulously provided for by an aggressive administration and are being cared for by District Collector Tapan Ray, who seems to have realised that the Narmada confrontation provides him an opportunity to earn a few cookie points with the bosses in Gandhinagar.

Perhaps swayed by the palpably unfair and tendentious reports in the vernacular media, the entire administration has allowed itself to be persuaded that the anti-dam rallyists are cracking up and that the unexpectedly inclement weather could very well turn out to be a long Russian winter for Baba Amte. The ground reality is that the administration is actually short of sound tactics, what to talk of well-thought-out strategies.

The administration is now caught in its own too-clever-by-half thinking. In the beginning, the police brass had persuaded the political leadership that it would be neither feasible nor desirable to allow the Baba and others march all the way to Kewadia Colony, and that, purely from the bandobast point of view, it would be better to confront them at the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat boundary.

This unwittingly created an impression of the mammoth administrative machinery flexing its muscle against a small group of marchers. Interestingly enough, even though the administrative set-up knew that the anti-dam marchers did not exceed more than 3,000, the political leaders in Gujarat kept suggesting that 25,000 tribals, armed with all kinds of weapons, were on their way to demolish the sacred Narmada dam.

But, ultimately, it is the chief minister who has only himself to blame for the stalemate. It was his deliberate and calculated decision to whip up the Narmada frenzy, in order to wrest the initiative away from his former coalition comrades in the Bharatiya Janata Party who managed to convert Gujarat into one of the most communally heated states in the country. Chimanbhai Patel's strategy boiled down to "confront hard communalism with soft fascism". All the religious figures, who would otherwise preach from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's platform, were persuaded to lend their voice and rhetoric skills to depict Baba Amte as Evil Incarnate.

The rising crescendo of intolerance is to be seen to be believed. A handful of anti-dam activists, who dared to question the Narmada dam publicly, have bashed up, with the police being mere spectators.

On the other side, the anti-Narmada forces, too, have been remarkably short of imaginative responses. Even if one were to discount the official reports that some People's War Group elements have infiltrated the Baba Amte camp, it is obvious that the hardliners of the Nirnaya Samiti are obdurate enough to derail any negotiated settlement. Their regard for the integrity and intentions of the Narmada Nigam bureaucracy is so low that they are not prepared to trust anything the Gujarat government may have to offer. However, they have to understand that sympathy of the media, national and international, will not be enough to break the deadlock.

But what is more disturbing is the mental outlook behind the jingoist campaign. The chief minister has openly accused the critics of Narmada of being foreign agents. He has dismissed the critical comments in the national media with contempt: "I do not read (or care for) newspapers; and knowing fully well that equations in New Delhi are precarious, Chimanbhai Patel has boasted that he would not even listen to Chandra Shekhar should the prime minister want to advise a review of the Narmada project."

It is a Kafkaesque irony that no one hears of the most pertinent and possibly the only beneficiary of the Narmada project— Jai Prakash Associates— in all the din and noise at Ferkuva.

## Baba 'obstinate' on Narmada, says Patwa

Independent 13.1.91

BHOPAL (PTI)

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Sunderlal Patwa yesterday said there was "no justification" for carrying on the Narmada Bachao Andolan by Baba Amte and others social workers who were continuing it because of their "sheer obstinacy."

The opponents of big dams had hardly any knowledge of the ground realities and were only propagating "imported ideas," Patwa said, adding that the agitators were ignoring the findings of both Indian and foreign experts on the project's technical soundness and the benefits that would accrue by it.

"None of the prominent activists like Baba Amte, Medha Patkar and Swami Agnivesh is an environment specialist and they have no right to doubt, question or challenge the collective wisdom of top engineers and enviornmental experts," Patwa said.

He said the movement to stop development work on the project, in the name of conservation of environment, was a "conspiracy" of the developed countries to obstruct the third world's development.

Defending the dam's construction, Patwa said a total of 46 lakhs hectares of additional land— 28 lakhs in MP and 18 lakhs in Gujarat— would come under irrigation when the development of the Narmada valley was fully achieved through 29 major dams, 135 medium and 3,000 minor irrigation works

He pointed out that the project would create fresh irrigation potential almost equal to that of Punjab and this was no mean achievement.

Stating that there was no inherent conflict between development and conservation of environment, Patwa said that the four big dams, namely, Narmada Sagar, Omkareshwar, Maheshwar and Sardar Sarovar in madhya pradesh were interdependent and the gains and losses from them had to be viewed together.

Independent
15 Jan. 91

# Chalo Narmada

**by SHAILENDRA YASHWANT and RANVIR NAYAR**

*A 6000-strong crowd protesting against the Narmada project camped out in the open braving the cold, the Gujarat police and their spies. A day-by-day account of the week the* Independent *team spent with the agitators*

**Phata, December 28**

The 6000-strong Jan Vikas Sangharsh yatra for the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), after covering over 180 kms since December 25, from Rajghat, has camped in the fields of this small, unknown village, about 50 km from the Gujarat border. It is already late in the afternoon and although it's all quite chaotic, arrangements are under way. A group of men is setting up tents, the venue for the NBA office. Later in the night, the strategy to be adopted the following day will be discussed here.

Marchers, spread out all over the fields, have assembled in groups and are busy making preparations for lunch. The women, about 2500 of them, knead the dough which is later baked and served with piping hot *dal* generously laced with chillies. After a bath in the freezing stream running around the camp, the marchers sit under the parked tractors and have their meal. Later in the evening, as the sun sets and the mercury dips, they get together to sing their folk songs, exchange notes and narrate their individual experiences.

Nevati, a six-year-old, who has trekked almost 180 kms from Dhulia, says, "I am here to save Narmada *maata*. I am not scared of the police bullets or lathis." Nevati's sentiments are echoed widely by almost all the marchers, who are convinced that this is their only chance. "Staying at home would mean waiting for the dam to be completed and submerge our village. This way at least we can give it a try," says 70-year-old Rukmini from Nimar district of Madhya Pradesh.

About the proposed rehabilitation offer by the government, Vaniya, a 28-year-old farmer from a village on the banks of the Narmada, says, "I have seen what sort of rehabilitation the Gujarat government has given to the people from Jalsindhi. They have been there for almost a year now and I have visited them quite often. Each time they have told me of how they were far better off in MP and that they have made a big mistake by accepting the government's offer of shifting. They have been given barren lands, their children suffer from malnutrition, lack of schooling and medicinal facilities. It is miserable over there. I am not going to move even if the Gujarat government offers me the best of facilities. After all, my village is my own," he says.

"How can we trust a government which has not yet bothered to inform us that our lands will be submerged by the dam, almost five years after the contruction work on the site has started?" asks 65-year-old Sejumal.

All this appears to fuel the determination of the marchers, and soon the skies are rent with *"Koi nahin hatega, bandh nahin banega"* and *"Sardar Sarovar kya karega, sabka satyanash karega."* As the evening gets colder, the marchers bring out their bed rolls and sacks, readying to sleep. The activists, including those directly affected by the dam, are still busy chalking out the next day's plan of action. The big white moon in the sky is serenaded by a tribal's flutesong. Warm and comfortable in our sleeping bags, tired after the long haul, the flute soothes us into sleep.

**Ferkuva, Gujarat, December 29.**

Troops of homeguards and Gujarat police run around in neat formation. Mounted police gallop up and down the narrow road. Busloads of people start pouring in for the scheduled pro-dam rally and, if necessary, to form a human chain to stop the anti-dam marchers from entering Gujarat. A sizeable group—about 5,000 policemen and homeguards and over 50,000 men and women, each paid an amount of Rs 25, a free bus-ride from all over the state and packed lunch courtesy the Swaminarayan sect. The "lieutenants" start arriving in government cars. Police and volunteers try to control the crowd as the *"chhote sardar"* arrives in a red and white helicopter. Surrounded by his bodyguards, the Gujarat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel is seen questioning the men who have been supplying advance intelligence of the marchers.

Patel's axe soon falls. His men appear to have goofed. The marchers are expected to walk in the day after and not today. They determine to be prepared for the day after. The chief minister asks for the mike. A string of abuses follows, damning the anti-dammers, and his lieutenants and the crowds join in. Soon it is lunchtime and *poha* and *puris* are served. Those who manage to get hold of the packets retire to the shade of the trees. The homeguards pull on their civvies and shout slogans, filling in for the pro-dam marchers on the road to Chandgaon (MP).

After crossing the no-man's land created under section 144 to arrest the marchers one cannot help but notice the contrast at the other end where nearly 8000 of the dam-affected villagers and activists sit solemnly singing songs of *inquilab*. Are they scared?. *"Bilkul nahin, hum to ghar se nikle the jaan dene ko, waise bhi ye dam hamari jaan le hi legi,"* says a 45-year-old mother of three who has trekked over 200 kms by now. Are they scared, we ask some young tribal girls. After some coaxing from

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activist friend, they reply from behind their *palus* that they have come here to settle the issue once and for all. If that meant losing their lives, it hardly mattered, they say. Dusty and tired, angry and apprehensive, they wait.

**Chandpur, December 30.**

The last night of the year, the mercury plunges even further. Most of the marchers are unable to sleep in the biting cold. The exhaustion and the tension that the new year is to bring is written on their faces. But they have gathered again and sit around, solemn.

After several encounters with the Gujarat police and their "spies," we have managed to win their confidence and are allowed to freely move up and down the "border." *"Ab yahaan par to India-Pakistan ho gaya hai bhai,"* quips a senior government official. While the marchers get ready to enter Gujarat, we decide to take a look at the situation across the border and find out how the human chain is faring. Unfortunately, most of the buses that have arrived are empty and the homeguards, in civvies, have decided to sit in for the pro-dam people.

A group of vociferous women led by Patel's wife screams, *"Baba, tum waapas jao,"* (Baba, go back), referring to Baba Amte who has adopted the cause of the oustees as his own and joined them. Baba Amte requests a dialogue with the people of Gujarat. The day ends as it had [illegible] with the anti-dammers spending the cold night out in the open, near the MP border, and the pro-dammers, whose numbers have dwindled to less than 300 by now, safely ensconsed in their guest houses at Chhota Udaipur.

**December 31.**

The pro-dam supporters have managed to recoup their forces again. Anticipating the entry of the march into Gujarat, men, women and children have been marshalled from Vadodara and other places. They sit near the Bodhra river, led by Swami Sachidanand, Mahendrabhai, chief of the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce, Harivallabh Parikh and Chunibhai Vaidya. Acting on cues from their leaders and others from the district administration, the crowd starts to get a little unruly.

Baba Amte, wishing to initiate a dialogue with them, walks down a distance of two kms. But they refuse to listen to him, and boo him away instead. As he starts to speak, someone turns off the amplifier rendering him almost inaudible.

The talk ends and Baba has no choice but to retreat to his camp and wait—the pro-dam groups do not have qualified men to represent their cause and conduct the talks. A 40-hour dharna is declared by the NBA activists, to allow them time to bring up their leaders for the dialogue.

**January 1**

To help the supporters of the dam, who are once again down to a couple of hundreds, the state administration waives the conditions of section 144 and allows them to come within striking distance of the activists and attack their leaders.

Across the border, the dharna continues despite the provocations, and the attempts by the government to spark a confrontation are unable to break the discipline and determination of the illiterate tribals.

**January 2**

As the 40-hour deadline races to its conclusion on Wednesday morning, preparations have begun across the border for the trial of strength between the two factions. At about 11.30 am, 25 oustees from the three states march ahead into Gujarat, hands tied in front of them, singing songs of martyrdom. Their strategy has caught the administration which has been expecting a violent confrontation, off-guard. The officials are taken by surprise. They cannot allow the march to go on but neither can they use force on the unarmed, non-violent marchers.

They are stopped about 50 metres away from the other faction and told that they are not to go any further in the interest of peace. "Was it in the interest of peace that you allowed them to come up to our march to abuse us, to provoke us?" asks Bhangwanbhai, the leader of the *jatha*. The district magistrate is speechless.

Unable to pierce the wall of women homeguards, the marchers sit in a protest dharna at the site, hands tied, shouting slogans against the dam.

**Epilogue: January 5**

Newspaper reports indicate a victory for the marchers again. In a war of nerves, the government ran out of patience. The police cracked down on the marchers—a woman activist's clothes were torn off in the ensuing melee and 140 activists who dared to cross the border were arrested.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Ferkuwa, M.P.-Gujarat border
Press Statement
14.1.1991

The Narmada Bachao Andolan reiterates that the objective of the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra is a complete review of the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Project. The review should be concomitant with the stoppage of all the irreversible work related to the Project. The content and the modus operandi of such a review has already been presented by the Andolan to the Prime Minister's office in May, 1990.

The discussions leading to such a review should be conducted with the persons authorised by the government to take decisions to which it will be bound.

Such a review is meaningful only when accompanied by the cessation of all the irreversible work on the Project, such as work on the riverbed, forest clearance in proposed submergence area and the displacement and land acquisition process. The proposed review would be done on a time bound schedule.

As the indefinite hunger strike by the seven representatives led by Smt. Medha Patkar enters the eighth day, more and more people from the valley and the supporting organisations are joining the Sangharsh Yatra. On Sunday over eighty activists from the Shoshit Jan Andolan in Maharashtra arrived at the camp. About thirty tribal activists from the Akkalkuwa tehsil in the Narmada Valley came in addition to fifty from Akrani on Saturday. Bands of peasants from the Nimad region kept pouring in till the night.

Number of representatives from Gujarat too participated in the Yatra. Yesterday, members of Parivartan, Baroda, Inqilabi Communist Party, Forum for Education and Research and other individuals joined. Representatives like Bhaiji Kaka from the Sardar Sarovar Canal affected area, and Raman Dala Tadvi from Gara, near Kevadia colony too are part of the Yatra.

Ven Lama Lobjung, the member of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who visited our camp on 12th, had expressed his full support to the mission of the Sangharsh Yatra. Veteran Sarvodaya leader Kantibhai Shah too expressed his feelings as a 'visit to express love and affection to the mission and the missionaries'.

An observer team, consisting of Rameshwar Prasad Singh, M.P. from Bihar, Mr.Raghu Ram, a journalist and Mr. R. Venkatramani, a Supreme Court lawyer, visited the Sangharsh Yatra on 13th January. Mr. Venkatramani, after taking stock of the situation, sent telegrams to the President and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court requesting them to intervene to protect the right to life of the project affected people.

Justice Krishna Iyer's Support: Noted jurist V.K. Krishna Iyer, former judge of the Supreme Court, has asked the Prime Minister to have the entire matter regarding the Sardar Sarovar reviewed. In a letter to Baba Amte, the jurist has condemned the high dams as they challenge the basic philosophy of Third World Development. 'If your protest fails, Gandhiji fails, Antyodaya is eclipsed, Nature is defeated', he wrote. Mr. Krishna Iyer came down heavily upon 'mere production for profit and less distributive justice.'

According to him, 'water resources can and must be used, but the craze for the biggest to benefit the largest landlords at the expense of have-nots is obnoxious.' He decried the adamant attitude taken by the Government of Gujarat. 'I am for Gujarat. I am for India', he writes.

Jain Munis Defend the Cause: Respected Jain Muni, Vinay Sagarji, in one of his addresses in Badwani wished all success to the cause for which the Andolan is struggling. He welcomed the Andolan as a 'commendable step on the way to Truth.' It is learnt reliably that various Jain saints and monks supported this 'commendable step on the Path of Truth' while they proceeded to the Bawangaja, a Jain pilgrim centre, for the Mahamastakabhishek ceremony.

Complaint against 'Sandesh', 'Gujarat Samachar': The Andolan has approached the Press Council of India against the Department of Information of the Government of Gujarat and some of the Gujarati language dailies, such as 'Sandesh' and 'Gujarat Samachar'. According to the complaint, these dailies and the government department indulged in creating mass hysteria against the peaceful Sangharsh Yatra, as if it were a foreign aggression. While doing so, the press flouted all the norms of journalist ethics and propriety. It indulged in acts of appealing to narrow provincial feelings and spreading disharmony between the people of Gujarat and the other people. It crassly indulged in scurrilous, scandalous and totally false news campaigns and sponsored advertisements, articles which were aimed at personal defamation and instigating violence against the Sangharsh Yatra. The complaint to the Press Council pointed out to the one sided, biased reporting and the refusal to carry the version or clarification from the Andolan. Distortions of facts, provocative, instigating statements and government sponsored articles and advertisements, unfounded allegations have been the order of the day for these Gujarat dailies.

Report by NCHR and NFF: Meanwhile, Mr. Jai Sen of the National Housing Rights Campaign and Mr. G. John of the National Fishermen's Forum have released a report of their 'Fact-Finding Mission' which visited both pro-dam and the Sangharsh Yatra camps on 8th January. Impressed with the ideological content and the political, moral level at which the Andolan has placed the issues and the self supported, efficient organisation of the Sangharsh Yatra, the team concluded that the Narmada Bachao Andolan has 'superior moral strength' compared to the pro-dam mobilisation. According to the team, the Gujarat side retaliated to such an agitation in chauvinistic, sectarian and religious, proto-fascist terms creating an irrational mental violence. It expected only the Central Government or the Supreme Court to intervene as the Gujarat government has lost all the political and moral right and role to intervene.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Ferkuwa, M.P.-Gujarat border
PRESS STATEMENT
15-1-1991

Pro-Dam Rally Continues Playing Dirty Tricks

While the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra participants have maintained their peace and calm, the Pro-dam rally participants are continuing their game of harassing Baba Amte and the small representative group of tribals and villagers who are camping with him inside Gujarat near Ferkuwa. One of the dirty tricks they have played in the last few days is to sing and shout slogans through the night on a public address system, with the loudspeakers turned towards Baba's camp. Since none of the pro-dam rally leaders stay overnight at the site, their sleep of course is not disturbed. But Baba has been unable to sleep well for several days now, with serious repercussions on his frail health. He now has continuous painful throbbing in his head.

On 13th, Baba decided to meet the pro-dam people himself to comment on above tactics. When he walked up to them, they lay down on the road and fell silent. They started quiet prayers subsequently, but face to face with Baba seemed unable to repeat the slogans `Baba Go Back', `Baba ko sanmati de bhagwan', refrains they had been shouting just a few minutes back.

The District Collector, Tapan Ray, was present during the incident and promised to try and stop the mike at night. Late in the evening he told us that the two loudspeakers facing us were removed so only one loudspeaker facing the pro-dam camp remained. Yet, later in the night, one loudspeaker facing us was revived and songs-slogans continued through the night at full volume. One of the Yatra participants went early morning to request them to turn the loudspeakers around, or stop using the mike, but this had no effect.

It is shameful that unable to engage in full discussions with us, unable to confront us with the true facts and figures, the pro-dam rallyists are using such below-the-belt tactics. Directed against an aged and sick man, they are all the more condemnable. The fact that the residents of Ferkuwa too must be getting disturbed seems to be of little consequence to the pro-dam people. We demand that the Collector use his powers to stop this harassment, using, for instance, the provision against public nuisance in the Cr.P.C. Or, is he unable to do so because of the political heavyweights involved in the pro-dam rally?

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# People versus government

**Six thousand people participated in a 250-kilometre-long march protesting against the Sardar Sarovar Project; twelve anti-dam activists are on an indefinite fast demanding that work on the dam be stopped. It is a battle in which the people have taken on the might of the Gujarat government, and one that will leave its mark on the environmental movement here.**
**Nachiketa Desai** and **Ranvir Nayar** report

THE OBSCURE little hamlet of Ferkuva in Gujarat, 1.5 km from the Madhya Pradesh border, displays all the signs of attaining the glory of a Bardoli or Dandi where epic non-violent struggles were carried out by Mahatma Gandhi and his unarmed followers against the might of the British empire.

The Mahatma's mantle is being carried by the 77-year-old eminent social worker Baba Amte and the 36-year-old social activist Medha Patkar. Their foot-soldiers are the 6000-odd villagers of MP, Maharashtra and Gujarat whose land and homes are going to be submerged in the gigantic reservoir of the mammoth Sardar Sarovar Project.

Beginning last Christmas from Rajghat near Badwani in MP, this army of non-violent resisters reached Chandpur, 2 km from the Gujarat border, on New Year's eve. They had trekked over 250 km on foot braving the chill. Their destination was Navagam where they intended to offer satyagraha against the multi-crore-rupee Sardar Sarovar Project.

Many had written off the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra, launched by the Narmada Bachao Andolan in order to stage a satyagraha at the site of the Sardar Sarovar Project, even as it was conceived. They had awarded the match to the Gujarat government even before the battle had begun.

However, as the yatra progressed through remote villages of Khargone and Dhar districts of Madhya Pradesh in the last week of 1990, it became clear that the battle, far from being a 'no-contest', had shaken the Gujarat government. Indeed, the yatra became a game of wits between 7000 villagers, mostly tribals, and the might of the Gujarat government.

The yatra started with barely 2500 people from MP, Maharashtra and Gujarat but grew threefold as it moved ahead, with national and international media accompanying it. While the Gujarat chief minister succeeded in influencing the local press, he was unable to do the same with the national newspapers. To add to his anguish was the string of diplomatic victories that the Andolan was registering, catching the government on the wrong foot several times.

The first such mistake occurred on December 28. The following day the yatra was to reach Alirajpur—a small town about 230 km from Indore —where more than 3000 tribals from Maharashtra were to join it.

The Gujarat police expected the tribals, who had marched over 180 km of extremely hostile terrain, to enter MP via Gujarat. Hence, the government unofficially sealed the border, so that the marchers from Maharashtra could be arrested before they joined the yatra at Alirajpur.

The Andolan came to know of this strategy and despatched a leading activist to warn the marchers from Maharashtra to change their route. Ironically, this activist was on the top of the wanted list of the Gujarat government, to be arrested the moment she entered the state.

When the Gujarat government came to know that the activist had been literally under their noses for a whole day and managed to slip back into MP, it reportedly transferred the circle police inspector.

The government got a bloody nose again the following day, this time due to the failure of their intelligence set-up. Under the belief that the yatra would enter Gujarat on December 29, elaborate preparations had been made to prevent it from doing so as well as to stage a counter-rally to be addressed by the self-styled general of the pro-dam agitationists, the chief minister himself. Hundreds of ST buses had been deployed to ferry people from all over the state to Ferkuva.

A 2000-strong contingent of armed policemen had taken position along the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border. The chief minister had set up a control room there to monitor the deployment of the police, and check-points were set up at all entry points on the border.

The massive operation, however, turned out to be an exercise in futility. Though over 60,000 persons gathered for the government-sponsored picnic at Ferkuva, the anti-dam yatra had not yet left Alirajpur, about 20 km from the border.

The crowd melted even before the public meeting was over. For the free meal comprising puri shaak and laddoo supplied by the Swaminarayan sect was more attractive than the fire-breathing speeches of the chief minister and other political leaders. Besides, there was no 'enemy' to beat back with a human chain.

Oblivious of the war cry on that side of the border, the no-dam marchers were performing street plays, singing songs and addressing street-side meetings in Alirajpur.

This bungle took place despite the despatch of a team of intelligence officials headed by an IPS officer to MP to gather information on the preparations of the no-dam activists. The intelligence men carried press accreditation cards issued by the Gujarat government, but could be easily identified as plainclothesmen from their close-cropped hair and shoes. Besides, the SP in-charge of the intelligence team happened to be known by the no-dam activists who had seen him in Rajpipla while he was the sub-divisional police officer.

On December 30, when the no-dam marchers began their last lap of the trek through MP, from Alirajpur to Chandpur, about 100 youths took charge of the border check post at Ferkuva, roughing up anyone who happened to come from MP. The youths were led by a person who identified himself as the brother of a cabinet minister close to Chimanbhai Patel.

The hired crowd that had been brought by the Narmada Foundation and the Narmada Abhiyan Samiti for the pro-dam rally having dispersed, the government directed policemen and homeguards to discard their uniforms and put up a demonstration against the yatra. The administration also cleared a 1.5 km stretch from the MP border to the Bhodar bridge, declaring it as prohibited area under section 144 of the CrPC.

Thus when the anti-dam marchers arrived at the Gujarat border on December 31, there were only policemen and homeguards to stop them instead of the 'sea of humanity' which the chief minister had threatened to organise. About 500 homeguards in civilian clothes staged a sit-in on the Bhodar bridge after Baba Amte insisted on having a word with the pro-dam demonstrators. While over 6000 anti-dam marchers remained on the MP side, Amte, accompanied by a few colleagues, was allowed to proceed up to the Bhodar bridge, where he made a brief speech amid the shouting of slogans against him, invited the crowd for a dialogue and went back to MP.

Even as the anti-dam marchers began a 40-hour dharna at the border to give time to the pro-dam agitators to respond to Amte's invitation, the Gujarati press reported, 'Baba Amte beats retreat' 'Anti-dam marchers pushed back by the people of Gujarat'. On January 1, a crowd of about 100 pro-dam demonstrators came up to the MP border where the anti-dam dharna was on. They had brought with them professional quawwals who started singing parodies of popular Hindi film songs through loudspeakers, ridiculing Baba Amte.

But the 6000-odd anti-dam marchers remained silent. In the evening, when the pro-dam demonstrators tired of shouting, tribals in the anti-dam camp presented a cultural programme.

The government machinery was brought to its knees by the marchers on January 2, when about 25 female oustees of the SSP from the three affected states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and MP, moved into Gujarat at the end of the 40-hour-dharna, hands tied in front of them, symbolic of their slogan '*hamala chahe jaisa hoga haath hamara nahin uthega*', singing songs of martyrdom. Their strategy caught the administration, which had been expecting a violent confrontation, off-guard.

They were stopped by the police 50 metres before the Bhodar bridge. The women squatted on the road and began a dharna which continued through the bitingly cold night. The next day another group of over 50 anti-dam marchers proceeded in a similar manner and were again stopped by the police.

Encouraged by their successful entry into Gujarat, the anti-dam marchers tried to send in over 150 satyagrahis on January 4. But this time they were stopped by the police within 50 metres of the border. Women in the forefront of the satyagrahis were manhandled by plainclothesmen and activist Chitrarupa Diwan's saree and blouse were torn by the police; she had to change her clothes in front of all.

As a cover-up, the police arrested seven activists and charged them with assault on government servants and rioting. The Gujarati press was told how the no-dam activists had bitten a woman homeguard and attempted to snatch away her *mangalsutra*. The same night the police swooped down on those staging the dharna inside Gujarat, beat up and molested women and whisked them away to unknown destinations in buses.

Even Baba Amte was not spared humiliation at the hands of policemen. On January 5, when he started for Gujarat, his ambulance van following him, a posse of women homeguards stopped him and pushed him around for more than half an hour. He was only allowed to proceed upto the Bhodar bridge after five hours. There, a 300-strong crowd had been collected by the pro-dam agitators.

Notwithstanding the victory, the strenuous 10 days of the march had begun to take its toll. About 500 persons fell off the yatra in its first week due to ill-health or exhaustion. But neither age nor fatigue deterred the scores of old men and women and children from marching on with the same enthusiasm as they had displayed at Rajghat.

What kept them going and what turned the pro-dam displays into damp squibs was the former's commitment and the latter's lack of it.

76-year-old Godavri from Chhota Barda village in MP, was advised in Alirajpur to return home as her feet had swollen and her body was showing signs of fatigue. She refused. "*Hamne to shapath lee thi Rajghat par ke hum bandh tak chal ke jaaenge, ab kaise tod dein woh shapath. Hum thakh kar baith jaaenge to hamara bachcha kya khayega?*" she asked.

The rallyists drew strength from their collective identity and the presence of an organisation to support and represent them. Besides, they knew that they could win only by remaining united.

The people were well prepared for the stalemate that is on now at Ferkuva. "We have come prepared to stay here for months, if necessary. Agreed it is painful and does cause worry at home, but do I have an option? If I do not protest my lands will be submerged. I will die anyway, so why not die boldly," asked 60-year-old Mangilal Bhongre.

It is this question of life and death that gives a moral strength to the struggle of the anti-dammers, which the pro dammers lack. This factor keeps them going on despite sleeping out in the cold in near-zero temperatures, fed on a starvation diet of dal-batti. The pro-dammers, who report on duty at 1 pm everyday, are fed lunch, tea and snacks by the Rangpur ahsram of Swami Sachidanand. Sharp at 5.30 pm, there is a mad scramble for the buses that will cart them to the guest houses at Chhota Udepur. As dusk approaches, all is quiet on the western front, deserted save for the odd policeman who dares to venture out in the biting cold.

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(Cont...)

Following this would be the narration by several marcher of their personal experiences about the SSP and what made them join the march.

Throughout the yatra, the marchers kept their doors open for talks with the pro-dam demonstrators. Their only condition was that in case the talks involved any representative of the government, all irreversible work on the SSP should be stopped till a complete review was completed. The anti-dam agitators were even prepared to have a dialogue with the pro -dam demonstrators on the methodology of carrying out agitations. But neither the government nor representatives of the Narmada Foundation and Narmada Abhiyan Samiti were prepared to hold talks with the anti-dam activists.

The indefinite fast by Medha Patkar and 11 other anti-dam activists inside MP and Baba Amte's dharna in Gujarat has helped Chimanbhai Patel project himself as the only saviour of Gujarat. However the stalemate at Ferkuva is proving to be a strain on the police administration. As for the pro-dam demonstrations, school and college students from Chhota Udepur are being brought daily to put up a show.

Whatever the end result of the march, it has made an indelible mark on the history of environmental movement in the country and also marked the beginning of a phase in the movement, where the project-affected people have made it known that they will fight for their right to life.

NARMADA DAM

# Tense situation at fast site

By a Staff Reporter

THE fact-finding team on the Narmada dam stir is back in New Delhi with some frightening facts on the situation at the indefinite fast site on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border. The team comprised Mr R. Venkataramani, a Supreme Court advocate, and Mr M. Raghuram, a freelance journalist.

Addressing a Press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday, Mr Raghuram said that the Jan Vikas Yatra against the mega dam is snowballing into a major crisis. There has been a sharp deterioration in the physical condition of Baba Amte, and the seven people who embarked on the indefinite fast 10 days ago are firm on their stand.

The coercive apparatus of the State has created a war-like situation at the site. Police forces deployed by the Gujarat Government in strength are reportedly indulging in deliberate violence. There will also be the second State-sponsored rally on January 18 and the District Magistrate has already directed Baba Amte to roll back his van at the risk of being crushed by the "pro-dam" State-sponsored forces, said Mr Raghuram.

The team has also alleged that the Gujarat Information Department is wilfully distorting facts and the "chauvinistic" Gujarati Press is projecting the anti-dam peaceful stir as being foreign-funded, anti-Gujarati and spearheaded by "hateful" Maharashtrians. Gujarat Doordarshan too is not lagging behind in spreading disinformation, the team said.

The team adds that the Gujarat Chief Minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, has resorted to forcibly bringing in schoolchildren and innocent Adivasis to demonstrate and sing and dance at the fast site. "Are these the kind of values that should be inculcated in India's children," they question.

The team alleged that the Chief Minister's wife, Ms Urmilaben Patel, president of the Women's Action Group of Gujarat, brings about 500 people on a daily shift basis and leads this demonstration comprising a motley crowd. According to the fact-finding team, she has blocked routes for negotiation all along,, only proving that the "pro-dam" stir has been initiated by Mr Patel for purely selfish reasons.

"Besides, there are large-scale benami transfers of land occurring all along the canal route," said Mr Venkataramani. "The judiciary too seems to be working hand-in-glove with the Government as they have gone to ridiculous lengths by refusing to take up bail applications of the illegally arrested and by demanding sureties from the Gujarat Government for them."

"Baba Amte is now a very sad man who is deeply pained by the inaction of dignitaries including the President, Mr Venkataraman. He is now resigned to fight to the bitter end and has taken to writing poetry," said the team members.

Baba Amte is reported to have said : "I am pleading with my tears to exercise my rights. I am ready for death. It pains me that society is silent, but I wish to affirm that there will be no confrontation with the pro-dam agitators."

Statesman 17 Jan. 1991

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Ferkuwa.
17.1.1991

Thirty five Representatives from Kevadia Join the Sangharsh Yatra;
Indefinite fast enters eleventh day

The Sangharsh Yatra got a shot in the arm when about thirty five representatives from Kevadia and other villages along with those from canal affected villages in Gujarat arrived on 16th evening. They crossed the Gujarat border shouting slogans against the dam. Almost all the Yatra participants gathered near the border to welcome their brethren from Gujarat, who are now fighting to be included in project affected people. Veteran Sarvodaya leader in Gujarat Narayanbhai Desai too visited the Sangharsh yatra camp and enquired about the health of those on indefinite fast.

Several members of Parliament, including Atal Behari Vajpayee and Piyush Tirkey, released a Press Statement in Delhi, calling for an authorised dialogue between the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the Government. Noted personalities including Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, Dr. L.C. Jain, Habib Tanveer, Kuldip Nayar, Giri Deshingkar, Satish Gujral have also issued an appeal to this effect in Delhi.

As the indefinite hunger strike by the representatives of Narmada valley enters the eleventh day, the activists are feeling weak making it extremely difficult for them to carry on normal activities. Passing of ketone bodies, which may damage the kidney irreversibly, is found in Smt. Medha Patkar and Mrs. Shantabhai.

It is learnt that the Chief Secretary of the Government of Gujarat will be arriving to discuss with the representatives of the Andolan on 17th morning. The Andolan has made it clear, time and again, that for starting any meaningful and authorised dialogue for the review of the Project, all the irreversible works on the dam will have to be stopped till such a review is complete. It is, of course, ready for having discussions with any competent and authorised person which may lead to such a review. The Andolan has already explained its version of the contents and modalities of such a review.

# Dhotis mingle with jeans as activists vow to stop dam

**From Srinjoy Chowdhury**

**Ferkuva (Gujarat), Jan. 17:** Baba Amte and Ms Medha Patkar, leader of Narmada Bachao Andolan promised to work among the perennially drought-affected people of Saurashtra and Kutch if the government agreed to stop the construction of the Sardar Sarovar project.

The project was expected to alleviate the acute shortage of drinking water in these areas. "We are willing to do our bit for Kutch and Saurashtra but let the government stop the work first," said the visibly weakened Ms Patkar her voice reduced to a whisper. "True, the parched lips of the people of Kutch and Saurashtra should get the water first, but if the Sardar Sarovar project is Gujarat's lifeline it is the tribals' deathline," said Baba Amte.

Dismissing the offer, the pro-dam activists were gearing up for a massive rally here on Friday where the chief minister of Gujarat, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, would speak. Over 50,000 people were expected to attend.

And as gaudy paper kites dotted the skies over Gujarat as part of the Makar Sankranti day celebrations, the Narmada Bachao Andolan activists and pro-dam agitators, encamped within a km of each other, were still distant neighbours.

Though thousands bathed in the "holy" Narmada those for and against the Rs 12,000-crore dam were yet to decide on a date and agenda for talks. As the stalemate continued microphones blared in both camps. Clustered around a microphone, pro-dam agitators chanted, "Sardar Sarovar banao aur garibi hatao," while from the other side came full throated cries of "koi nahin hatega, baandh nahi banega."

**Kitchen for 1,500:** Besides, a dozen khaki police tents were the sprawling shamianas of the pro-dam activists. Though bleaching powder had been sprinkled on the makeshift open drains around the camp, dogs hovered for scraps and horses belonging to the Baroda police stood tied close by. Scattered around were smouldering ashes of wood fires and large water drums. In the central kitchen lay huge tins of mustard oil, bags of milk powder and piles of firewood. "We have to cook for over 1,500 people. Sometimes 5,000 people eat here," a member of the pro-dam Narmada Abhijan Samiti said.

ple had dug wells of over hun dred feet for water with hig flourine content. "We can't le all the water flow into the Ara bian Sea," said the forme associate of Jayaprakas Narayan. "Sure, one lakh peopl will be affected and may have t be forcibly evicted but tw crores people will benefit."

Next to the newly-opene roadside shops selling biscui and boiled eggs, sat R.V. Pa

## BATTLE OVER NARMADA

Cooks and capitalists, farmers and freedom fighters rubbed shoulders at the pro-dam camp. "The prosperity of Gujarat depends on the Sardar Sarovar project. We need the electricity for the sugar mills and the new industries," said Suren Chowksi, president of the Central Gujarat Chamber of Commerce.

Veteran Gandhian Chunibhai Vaid supported the dam as it would solve the water shortage in the four districts where peo-

mer, a young farmer from Bha uch. "Baba Amte should g away. His cries about tribal suf fering and environmental dam age are mere excuses." A worke at the kitchen said, "We wil only leave when Baba Amt leaves."

**Govt backing:** The pro-dam agi tators faced no shortage of re sources as they had the govern ment behind them. Even yester day orange and white Gujara police vans brought in severa

hundred pro-dam agitators to Ferkuva.

In the dispensary waits Dr A.S. Trived with plastic jars of pills in front of him. Two medical officers employed by the government of Gujarat were always on duty. "Besides common ailments I have dealt with cases of heart attacks and hypertension and one person was gored by a bull," Dr Trived said. He had his orders, "I am here as long as Baba Amte is here."

**Sangharsh gaon:** The Narmada Bachao Andolan activists lacked the resources of its rivals. But its activists were spurred by the belief that their cause was right. Some have a lot to lose including their land and lifestyle.

Chants of "lathi goli khayenge, Nimar ko bachayenge" and "Hindi, Marathi ya Gujrati larne valon ki ek jati," echo around "Sangharsh Gaon," the name given to the anti-dam camp where several activists on hungerstrike lay under the shamianas.

Farmers in dhotis and Gandhi caps mingled with others in jeans and leather jackets. "We walked all the way here and we won't leave till we are sure our lands won't be submerged," said 40-year-old Ram Pyari from Pimpri village in Barwanim district of Madhya Pradesh. "There is no land available, how will they resettle us?" asked Rajen Tomar, a young farmer.

Despite the resource crunch there was no shortage of food. "Look how close we are. The adivasis have run out of food, but the people of Nimar who brought sacks of grain in tractors were cooking for them," said Ms Medha Patkar.

Supporters were still streaming into the Narmada Bachao Andolan camp. Among the satyagrahis was Tomitaoa Watinabe, a university student and member of Friends of Trees of Japan, "The first world government savour these huge and unnecessary projects. But peasants and tribals are against them and I support the peasants and tribals," he said.

Telegraph, Calcutta 18 Jan, 91

# Damning the Amte group

## Nachiketa Desai on the smear campaign launched by the pro-dam lobby in the press

The role of the press in Gujarat has been crucial in the battle over the Narmada dam now being waged on the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border.

'Free flow of liquor in Baba Amte's camp'; 'Baba Amte kept captive by environmentalists'; 'Free sex common among no-dam marchers' screamed the headlines of the Gujarati press on the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra launched by the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

A war-like hysteria had been systematically built up against Baba Amte and Medha Patkar thro the Gujarati newspapers. The publicity blitz began simultaneously with the beginning of the countdown for the no-dam march. It was launched by the state government, the Narmada Foundation and the Narmada Abhiyan Samiti. A fear psychosis was generated through newspaper reports painting Baba Amte as a demon king out to destroy the Sardar Sarovar Project, described as Gujarat's 'life-line'.

Fed by the state directorate of information, the state press carried front-page reports of the war-like preparations being made by the police and the people of Gujarat to beat back the 'invasion' by Baba Amte's 'army' of zealot tribals who were 'armed to the teeth'. Journalists from Ahmedabad were put in a luxury hotel in Baroda by the Sardar Sarovar (Narmada) Nigam Limited and their thirst quenched with premium whisky so as to generate the right spirit to ensure proper coverage of the government-sponsored pro-dam rally at Ferkuva on the Gujarat-MP border.

Under fire: Baba Amte

Small-time workers of various political parties too got their names into news columns by issuing press statements making wild allegations against the no-dam marchers. The propaganda reached fever pitch on December 29 when the chief minister addressed the pro-dam rally.

On December 31, when the yatra reached Gujarat, the rallyists had dispersed, and homeguards in civilian clothes were organised to stage a dharna against the marchers. Representatives of the Narmada Foundation and the Narmada Abhiyan Samiti were also present. Slogans were raised against Baba Amte. But he insisted on addressing the demonstrators, and after a brief speech, invited them for a dialogue and then returned to the MP side of the border, to lead a dharna.

The dharna was partly meant to give the pro-dam lobby time to respond to the offer for a dialogue. But the Gujarati press interpreted it differently. 'Baba Amte beats retreat'; 'Anti-dam marchers pushed back by people of Gujarat', read their headlines.

On January 4, the police manhandled women activists trying to cross into Gujarat. Social activist Chitrarupa Diwan's sari and blouse were torn by the police and she had to change her clothes in front of everyone. But the Gujarati press carried the police version that the activists had beaten a woman homeguard and tried to snatch her mangalsutra.

The Guarati press as a whole helped Chimanbhai Patel project himelf as the 'saviour' of Gujarat. The only exceptions in the Gujarati press were *The Times of India* (Gujarati), the *Gujarat Mitra* from Surat and the *Abhiyan* weekly from Bombay.

The state directorate of information and publicity has been issuing news bulletins on a day-to-day basis about the 'growing demoralisation in the Amte camp'.

This high-pitched propaganda seems to have pained a section of the Sarvodaya leaders in Gujarat, who have initiated a move to persuade Medha Patkar and others to give up their indefinite fast and instead undertake a public awakening campaign in the state.

Independent. 19 Jan, 91

Deccan Herald 20 Jan 91

# Anti-dam agitation to continue as talks fail

20/1/91

DH News Service

BHOPAL, Jan. 19. — The deadlock on Madhya Pradesh — Gujarat border at Chandpur continued with the failure of the talks, between Gujarat Chief Secretary and anti-dam activists led by Baba Amte and Medha Patkar to resolve the dam issue.

Nearly 3000 anti-dam activists are camping on the border for the last 19 days in the hope to make it to Kevadia to stop the construction of the Mega dam. According to reports here on Thursday evening, the Gujarat Chief Secretary M.R. Khan visited the agitating leaders and held long discussions with Baba Amte, Medha Patakar and others. But there was no breakthrough, as the Gujarat Government refused to consider the demand to review the project. While activists offered to hold unconditional talks, they said that the whole gamut of the problem should be discussed, which was not acceptable to the Gujarat Government.

Mr. Khan flew in at Ferkuva in a special chopper, he said that the Gujarat Government was not rigid in its stand and wanted a peaceful solution to the issue. However, he totally ruled-out stoppage of the work on the dam site, which led to the failure of the talks.

The agitation has been continuing for the last 19 days with both sides adamant and not relenting. The Gujarat Government was expecting the stir would gradually petter out, but, indefinite hunger-strike by Medha Patak and seven others including two more women, has given fresh confidence and more determination to the demonstrators. The Gujarat Government has not allowed Baba Amte into the State and he is on dharan inside Gujarat border for the last 14 days.

On the other side, Gujarat Government sponsored show of strength, by organising rallies in favour of the dam was still continuing. The report said that the State Government has further beefed up security arrangement.

Meanwhile a two-member team from Delhi consisting of Supreme Court Advocate Venkitaraman and Raghuran, freelance Journalist who visited the border, has severely criticised the Gujarat Government for "suppressing peaceful movement. The MP Government too has adopted a rigid attitude and ruled out any concessions to the agitators. But the statement of BJP Vice-President Vijayraje Scindia, that she would launch a movement in Madhya Pradesh, if displaced persons were not properly rehabilitated, has caused ripples in Government circles here. However, the Government has so far not reacted to this. Ms. Scindia also talked to MP Naramada Valley Development Minister Shitla Sahai, and asked him to look into the grievances of the displaced persons. The Minister in a statement, while expressing reservation over the issue of lowering of the height of the dam, said that MP w have no objection if all the concer states agreed to this. He said lowering of the dam would adve affect the interest of the state. Gujarat Government has alr made it clear, that it would not sider any such proposal. Meanw leader of opposition in MP Asse has again reiterated his demand lowering the dam height, as it w reduce the sufferings of the peo He said that there would not be m displacement and major arable l could be saved.

But, there appears to be no en the agitation in near future. The jarat Chief Secretary who asked agitators to withdraw the stir in of the Gulf war, was told by activists that the agitations had going on for the last 25 days, while war had just broken out. Fu negotiations are not likely in the 15 days pointed out, the Chief S tary.

Indian Express, 20 Jan. 91.

# Chimanbhai shuts the door on future talks on dam

Express News Service

FERKUVA, Jan 19 – The door has been shut on further talks between Gujarat Government and anti-Narmada activists. On Friday, the Chief Minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, announced that the State Government would not take any initiative on reopening a dialogue with Baba Amte and other leaders of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Accusing the anti-dam activists of "intellectual terrorism", he said the State Government would not succumb to "blackmail". The demands for stoppage of construction work, reducing the dam height and review of the project were "not negotiable" as far as the State Government was concerned, he said.

The Central Government had also made it clear that it was not in favour of a review of the project, he pointed out. The Government had sent the Chief Secretary, Mr H.K. Khan, to hold talks with the Andolan leaders on Thursday, with little success. From now onwards, the Government would not take any initiative on the issue, he said.

Addressing a public meeting here, the Chief Minister said "nobody can now stop the dam from going ahead" and added that "the patience of the people of Gujarat should not be tested".

He said the Government and people of Gujarat had so far been tolerant of the anti-dam agitation but the Andolan was now no longer adopting peaceful means of protest. "We have a tradition for non-violence," he said, "but we cannot afford to ignore their violent tendencies any more".

Mr Patel told a gathering of about 5,000 people, from all over the State, that he had approached the Central Government on taking action against the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commissioner, Mr B. D. Sharma, who had been siding with the anti-dam protesters. "We were willing to discuss the issues of environment and rehabilitation, but the Andolan wants to question the basis of the project", he complained.

***The Gujarat Government has firmly shut the door on the face of anti-Narmada protesters, saying that the patience of the people has reached the end of its tether. The basis of the project, he has reiterated, is not open to question. A fact driven home by the collapse of talks between Government officials and the Narmada Bachao ASndolan activists on Thursday.***

The mood at the pro-dam meeting was surcharged, with leaders of almost all political parties in the State present. Most speakers criticised the role being played by Baba Amte, Ms Medha Patkar and other leaders. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, Mr Nalin Bhat, summed up the gung-ho sentiment. "We will teach Amte the same lesson that Bush has taught Saddam Hussein". The Forest Minister, Mr Mohansing Rathwa, urged the Chief Minister to give permission to the people of Gujarat to "drive away Amte".

Meanwhile, the indefinite fast by seven anti-dam activists and project affected persons (PAPs), continued. Leading environmentalists and social activists, Swami Agnivesh and Sunder Lal Bahuguna arrived here on Friday to express their solidarity with the struggle of the Narmada oustees.

Talking to newspersons, Swami Agnivesh said the people of Gujarat were being misinformed by the official machinery on the nature of the anti-dam agitation. He said the Gujarat Government was creating 'mob hysteria' for certain vested interests. He said he had arranged a meeting in Delhi last month between the Gujarat Narmada Development Minister, Mr Babubhai Patel, and the Andolan leaders. Mr Patel, he said, had agreed to a review of the project at the meeting, but had subsequently gone back on his word.

Swami Agnivesh said he had written to the Prime Minister to initiate talks on the Narmada issue. "There is no justification whatsoever," he said," for a prime minister to keep quiet on such an important issue". When the Prime Minister could hold talks with Punjab extremists and ULFA leaders, there was no reason why he should not hold talks with the Andolan leaders, he asserted.

Hindustan Times
20 Jan 91

# Dharna outside Gujarat Bhavan

**HT Correspondent**

NEW DELHI, Jan. 19

A group of Delhi-based environmental activists, protesting against the Narmada projects, today laid a seige of the Gujarat Bhavan, the State Government's guest house, in Chanakyapuri. They left the place only after being assured that their anxiety about the project would be conveyed to the State Government.

Shouting slogans and carrying banners highlighting the threat from the project to the environment and the local populace, the activists were able to prevent people from coming in and leaving the guest house, while the officials spoke to them.

They alleged that the State Government was not holding talks with the activists at Ferkuwa, on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border, where Baba Amte is camping and eight of the activists, led by Ms Medha Patkar, were on indefinite hunger strike. They expressed concern about their health.

Speaking for the State Government, Mr Jawed Choudhary, the Resident Commissioner, said the talks had taken place on a number of occasions, the last one being two days ago. Chi Secretary H. K. Khan, who spoke Baba Amte and others, had also com to speak to the Central Governme officials.

Mr Choudhary also impressed upo the agitators that any life was precio and tht the talks should lead to an en to the hunger strike. Also, the co struction work had been on for the la two years and more and was expecte to continue for some time. Henc there could be no purpose in seekin stoppage of work.

Mr Choudhary told Mr Smi Kothari, Mr Rajni Bakshi and other that the talks, like the construction i self, were an on-going process. Th work was going as per the Tribun report, which could be challenged on through a legal process. The Supren Court, he pointed out to the agitator had not stayed the construction.

The agitators wanted the work o the project to be stopped, as per th demand made by the activists campin at Ferkuwa. The State Governme has turned down this demand, whi willing to talk on the ecological aspec and the rehabilitation plans.

According to Mr Choudhary, th activists left Gujarat Bhavan peacefu ly after voicing their protest.

# Sarovar stir will continue: activists

E100/101 21/1/91

Times of India
21 Jan '91

BHOPAL, Jan. 20 (PTI).

THE Narmada Bachao Andolan today announced that its agitation against the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) would continue till it gets a concrete reply from the Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat governments in this regard.

Addressing a press conference here, Mr Rakesh Diwan and other andolan members deplored the attitude of the two states' governments towards the agitation. No worthwhile talks had been held so far on the issues arising out of the SSP mainly because of the adamant attitude adopted by the Gujarat government, they said.

"The Madhya Pradesh government had chosen to level false charges against the agitators, instead of replying to the issues raised by them. The issues cannot be resolved by saying that the andolan received support from foreign countries, Mr Diwan said.

Though the activists were on an indefinite fast for the last fourteen days, the Madhya Pradesh government had not shown any inclination to hold talks with them. The state government had not even been moved when noted social worker Baba Amte had fainted at the site of the dharna organised by the andolan against the SSP, Mr Diwan said.

In a democracy, every citize should be allowed to go to any state. Gujarat had denied this right by forcibly preventing agitators from entering that state. In these circumstances, it was the responsibility of the Madhya Pradesh government to take the initiative in asking for a review of the SSP and stopping work on it, he added.

TOINS adds from New Delhi: Some city based environmentalists and supporters of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, agitating against the Sardar Sarovar project in Gujarat, demonstrated in front of Gujarat Bhavan, yesterday.

The demonstrators carrying banners demanding stoppage of dam construction and review of the project landed around 2 p.m. They closed the thoroughfare of the bhavan by blocking both the gates. The demonstrators insisted on meeting the state governor, Prof Singh who they learnt had come for treatment and was staying there.

About 50 demonstrators led by Mr Saitu Kothari, however, left after three hours, when the state resident commissioner, Mr J.A. Chowdhary, assured them that he would convey their concern to the state government. Later, Mr Chowdhury told the TOINS that the demonstrators were concerned about the health of the eight Narmada Bachao activists who had been on a hunger strike at Ferkuva.

He said he had also asked them to prevail upon the hunger strikers to call off their strike as halting the dam work had nothing to do with the dialogue between them and the state authorities. He said the project work had been going on for the past three years and would as a matter of fact continue for over a decade. Hence their demand was unreasonable.

Meanwhile, the leader of the Maharashtra Janata Dal, Mrs Mrinal Gore, has made an impassioned plea to the Prime Minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar, to urgently mediate in the Narmada dam issue and compel the Gujarat government to reconsider its stand.

Mrs Gore has just returned from Ferkuva. She also urged the Prime Minister to save the lives of the seven workers of the movement who were on an indefinite fast. One of them had been hospitalised and the condition of the rest was fast deteriorating, she informed.

She demanded that the displaced adivasis be rehabilitated in the command area of the project. She said that 164 villages in Madhya Pradesh, 33 in Maharashtra and 19 in Gujarat would be affected by the dam. This would displace 50,000 adivasi families, she said.

# Chiman ready for talks on Narmada

Independent
21 Jan, 91

GANDHINAGAR (PTI) Gujarat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel yesterday said his government was prepared to have a dialogue with the anti-Narmada dam agitators led by Baba Amte without preconditions.

Patel said the talks would be on issues relating to the rehabilitation of displaced persons and the environment. It could also be held with any of the agitation leaders in the presence of Baba Amte, he said.

He said he had written to Baba recently. But in reply, Baba put certain pre-conditions for talks like review of the project and stoppage of work, which were not acceptable to the government.

According to report from Bhopal. former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shyamacharan Shukla yesterday urged the Union government to intervene and reduce the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam in Navagaon in Gujarat.

Shukla said by reducing the height of the dam from 455 ft to 410 ft, about 40,000 acres of land, including 26,000 acres of cultivated land and 14,000 acres of valuable forest area would be saved from submergence and displacement of 240 villages could be avoided.

A report from New Delhi said two members of parliament yesterday urged president R Venkataraman to intervene to resolve the Narmada issue since the state governments of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra have not given attention to "this deeply human situation."

The MPs, Piyus Tirkey of RSp and Arvind Netam of the Congress-I said that a dialogue should be started with the Narmada Bachao Andolan without preconditions.

A report from Ferkuva in Gujarat said the commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, Dr B D Sharma, yesterday arrived here on a mediatory mission to bring pro and anti-Narmada project agitators to the negotiating table to help break the deadlock on the issue.

He said he had a telephonic talk with Sharad Pawar on Monday and the latter had assured that he would speak to his counterpart in Gujarat.

New Delhi: Former president Giani Zail Singh, has appealed to Baba Amte and his colleagues in the Jan Vikas Yatra to call off their indefinite fast against the construction of the Narmada dam project and "seek a negotiated solution."

Mr Zail Singh also appealed to the Gujarat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel to speedily resolve the problem through negotiations.

The need to uplift the Schedul Tribes is enshrined in our co stitution and our development pr grammes and priorities but u fortunately and paradoxicall there is an adverse effect on th condition, Mr Zail Singh observe

He said there was an urgent ne to project their legitimate interes in the course of our vital develo ment process and projects.

"Hence this appeal to all co cerned parties and their leaders, speedily resolve this national co troversy," he added.

Mr Zail Singh expressed conce over the condition of the sev persons, including Ms Med Patkar, who have been on fast f two weeks, one of them has be hospitalised in a "critical co dition."

The former president said in statement that negotiations for solving the issue were possib since "we are part of the univers quest for technology and develo ment with a human face, a development harmonious with li giving and sustaining enviro ment."

# Villagers vitalise Sarovar agitation

By MEENA MENON
The Times of India News Service

FERKUVA, January 21.

AFTER 15 days of indefinite hunger strike, the anti-dam activists continue to receive support from various quarters, and their demand for a comprehensive review of the project and stopping the irreversible works related to the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) remains firm.

Two persons have been hospitalised, one of them Shantabai, from Pipri village, on the weekend. However, the morale is high and Ms Medha Patkar said, "Every day is a new day for me".

While the Andolan is determined not to accept any compromise, a public rally on January 18 here, the Gujarat chief minister dubbing the agitation as 'intellectual terrorism', said no talks would be initiated by his government and the demand of stopping of the dam, reduction in the height of the dam or a comprehensive review were unacceptable.

The raucous music and bhajans near the Gujarat border where Baba Amte is camping continue all night, making it difficult for him to rest, and sleep for the activists and even the police there seem out of the question.

At the venue of the hunger-strike, a mini village has sprung up which has been named Sangharsh Gaon and a well-co-ordinated support network has been established.

The government is pulling out all stops to counter the agitation and a caveat was filed in the Gujarat high court Urging that it shoud be heard if 30 people, including journalists and activists, approached it to seek interim relief on the SSP issue.

The Maharashtra Janata Dal president, Ms Mrinal Gore, Swami Agnivesh and Sunderlal Bahuguna and Mr B.D. Sharma were some of the people who came to offer support to the agitation. The Andolan said that there were indications that the Madhya Pradesh government had stepped down from its adamant stand and the statements by the state's minister for irrigation, Mr Shectla Sahay and the rebel BJP leader, Mr Saklecha, indicated that the government might consider a review.

With the World Bank going in for an independent review of the SSP, the Andolan's stand seems to be vindicated, activists feel. Ms Patkar said the number of years spent on planning a project does not indicate the depth of investigation. "We have to look at emerging issues and on the total impact of the project of the people, resources and whether it is financially viable," she said.

The basis for the Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal award or the World Bank appraisal itself has changed and the Tribunal had anticipated this when it made a provision for a review, she said. Moreover the laws under which the social and environmental impact of such a large project could be assessed came into practice only in 1980, she said.

The people were not involved at any stage of the project and 90 per cent of them did not have even a chit saying their land or houses would be acquired for the project, Ms Patkar said. This was excluding the common property resources and it is the government's responsibility to give answers when the affected people raised questions. she said.

The agitation in the Narmada valley was strengthened by the Sangharsh yatra and the hunger strike and the programme had sensitised the country on developmental issues, she felt. The government was trying to give the impression that there was no agitation and they have been proved wrong. "We have to assert the right to life when the government is trying to crush people and nature," she said.

The hunger strike is symbolic of the fact that the struggle is indefinite and this is an issue of life and death, she said. Mr Girish Patel of Lok Adhikar Sangh, whose involvement with the struggle against the dam, led pro-dam people to burn his effigy near his house in Ahmedabad, was firm on the question of review. The project was conceived on the basis of the development ideology prevalent in the 60's when they were regarded as the temples of progress, he said.

The Narmada water dispute and the Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal which was set up in 1969 based the sharing of water on the fact that the total flow of water was 27 MAF (million acre feet). The focus was on water sharing and the height of the dam. The questions of oustees were dealt with only for Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh and the impact of the project, seismicity and other issues were not dealt with, he said.

With the entry of the World Bank in 1979, various studies were initiated and it was clear that these were not carried out earlier, he stated. No assessment studies on environmental impact, rehabilitation and cost benefit had been carried out, and the whole approach of the government was how to secure approval, he said.

Conditional clearance granted to the project was untenable for one of this size, he added when the feasibility of the project was in question.

If the flow of water has been reduced to 23 MAF, according to recent data, then this had a direct impact on the design of the dam, sharing of water and th project itself, he said.

Again the number of oustees due to submergence was one lakh, but the oustees due to canals, social forestry and minor works were not accounted for, he said. There was no catchment area treatment plant and this would have a direct impact on the flow of water. "What is wrong if the government is asked to stop construction for two to three months to review the project," he asked. In a democratic country this should not be difficult and if the government can call the Ram Janambhoomi and Babri Masjid representatives for discussion on a matter which is a non-issue, then why not apply the same rule here," he asked.

# Narmada activists' conditions worsen

FERKUVA (UNI)

The condition of the five fasting Narmada Andolan volunteers deteriorated further as their indefinite fast at the inter-state border here entered its 15th yesterday.

Two of the volunteers, Medha Patkar and Meghnad Bhattacharya, were reported to be serious. Out of the seven Bachao Andolan Volunteers who sat on an indefinite fast from January 7 as part of the protest against the Sardar Sarovar Project, two — Mohan Tadvi and Shantaben — have been hospitalised.

Meanwhile, the Andolan yesterday described union water resources minister Manubhai Kotadia's offer of talks on the Narmada issue as "meaningless."

In a letter to Baba Amte, Kotadia had suggested a meeting in New Delhi on January 23 to discuss the rehabilitation and environmental aspects of the Narmada project.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court yesterday issued notices on a petition seeking a directive to the Gujarat government to permit Andolan activists led by Baba Amte, to protest against the construction of the Narmada Dam in the state.

Notices, returnable on or before January 31, were issued to the union government and the Gujarat government by a division bench comprising Justice S R Pandiyan and Justice K J Reddy on the petition by Sahyog and the Andolan.

The petition further sought a directive to the state government to immediately hold a dialogue with Andolan representatives and if necessary set up a commission to mediate and suggest "just and honourable" solution of the problem.

The petition sought unconditional release of members, supporters and sympathisers of the Andolan who have being "illegally" confined.

It also sought revocation of Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code which prohibit assembly of more than five persons at one place, in the area.

The petition said that Andolan activists led by Baba Amte were prevented by so called pro-agitators led by Urmila Ben Patel, wife of Gujarat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel.

Patel, who returned from Delhi yesterday, said he had discussed various issues pertaining to the state with prime minister Chandrashekhar and other

He said finance minister Yashwant Sinha had assured him that the centre would give the final approval to the state for issuing the Narmada bonds in the first week of February

To

The President of India
New Delhi

Mahamahim,

We find ourselves in a state of deep anguish as we survey the callous indifference towards the fate of a large number of our fellow countrymen who are struggling against the Sardar Sarovar Project. The struggle of these people, particularly the tribal people, whose life and liberty are in jeopardy, in essence is a struggle for defending their right to life. An ugly situation has arisen because of the indifference of the state towards the basic rights of the people. This is reflected in confrontationist rather than conciliatory approach adopted by the state. Consequently there is open violation of even fundamental rights of the people.

Thousands of people-men and women, old and young - have trekked hundreds of miles through difficult hilly terrain and are staging a dharna on the borders of M.P. and Gujarat as they find their route blocked since January 1, 1991 on the otherside. Seven persons, including three women and two tribals, are on indefinite hunger strike. The fast has entered seventeenth day today. Even then there is no initiative from any side for ending the impasse and finding a just and humane solution of the human problem.

The Narmada Andolan is being portrayed as anti-development and is being accused as being unconcerned about the problems of our fellow citizens of Gujarat, specially in regard to a serious problem like drinking water. The issues raised by the Andolan are, however, entirely different which are being knowningly presented in a wrong perspective. No reasonable person can oppose deliberately any programme aimed at solving the problem of drinking water. But that does not mean that on this ground alone, the right to life of other people, can be negated and the basic premises of a civilised society can be violated.

The Andolan, particularly the tribal people, have been urging that the people must be taken into confidence before any step is taken by any authority which involves deprivation of the basis of their life. Secondly, if the resources on which their livelihood depends are sought to be used for any other purpose, they should be assured of a share in the benefits of new development. The economic alternative should be prepared in consultation with the concerned people so that they can satisfy themselves that the proposed benefits will really help them and that the tribal people in particular can retain their identity as a people. It is sad that the State has not given any attention to these simple and ordinary things,which has accentuated the polarisation between the people and the state.

We fully support the basic demands of the people concerning their right to life. The people, particularly the tribal people, have the basic right of continued use of those resources which they have been using traditionally for making a living. If the State requires these resources for an alternative purpose, prior concurrence of the concerned people should be obligatory.

The big projects in the Narmada Valley have ignored the human side. As the concerned people became aware about the real problems which they may face in future and gained confidence in assertion of their rights, they started the struggle with a solemn resolve to defend their right to life. We fully support their struggle. Nevertheless the reality that certain projects have been started which involve alternative use of the natural resources has also to be accepted. It is in this context that we make a special appeal to all parties in the dispute about the Sardar Sarovar to work out a settlement following the principles stated below and join hands in the great task of sustainable development with equity and social justice.

In any scheme of sustainable development with equity and social justice, human beings must occupy the central position. The problem of drinking water for Gujarat, particularly the Kutch and Kathiawar regions is a human problem and it should be satisfactorily resolved. The supply of water allocated to Gujarat as per the inter-state agreement and the Tribunal Award should be assured. Such engineering works as may be adjudged necessary for that purpose should be executed keeping however in view all resources available. It must also be simultaneously ensured that the human and the environmental costs of these projects are minimised. In other words, the projects should be so designed and executed that firstly the displacement of people and ecological destruction both are kept at the bare minimum. This aspect should be looked into by a group of experts which may be set up by the Govt. of India in consultation with the state governments and representatives of the Andolan. Secondly, a blue print for comprehensive rehabilitation of all affected people in all the states should be prepared in advance with their concurrence instead of being satisfied with framing of rules and issue of orders. There should be a provision for compulsary land acquisition in the the benefitted zone where necessary and the affected persons should be resettled as communities. The pace of construction work should be determined by satisfactory execution of rehabilitation programme and environmental works which should be accordingly regulated. Action should be taken forthwith through an appropriate agreement for formalising the concretising all these measures to be completed within a period of one month during which irreversible works and land acquisition should not be carried on.

(Sd-)
V. R. KRISHNA IYER
P. N. HAKSAR
NIKHIL CHAKRAVARTY
MRINAL GORE
BHAI VAIDYA
K. R. DATYE
VILASRAO SALUNKE

JANUARY 23, 1991

# Narmada stir enters second month

By Bharat Desai

FERKUVA (Baroda) Jan. 24: 'Chulas' in the Narmada Valley went cold as thousands of persons observed fast on Thursday to mark completion of one month of the latest phase of agitation against the Sardar Sarovar Project even as the indefinite fast by Ms Medha Patkar and dam oustees continued for te 18th day. Baba Amte was among the scores of people who observed fast throughout the day as the Narmada Bachao Andolan prepared to intensify the agitation further.

Hunger strike was observed in several tehsils of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra in response to the 'chulha bandh' call given by the Andolan. Protests were organised throughout the Valley and in several cities in the country to express support for the persons who will be displaced by the mammoth project. Memorials called 'sankalp stambhs' were erected overnight at about 40 villages and towns as people took pledge on Thursday to save the valley from destruction.

Even as the oustees expressed indignation over lack of response from the Government to the peoples' movement, a group of 'independent mediators' expressed hope that they would able to bring about a dialogue between the Gujarat Government and Andolan provided both the sides give up any pre-conditions for talks.

The condition of Ms Patkar and at least four other protesters continued to be critical, doctors attending on them said. The Jhabua district collector came to the satyagraha site and urged the Andolan leaders to allow Government doctors to examine the persons on fast. However, the Andolan declined the request on the ground that the doctors would advise their forcible removal to hospital for emergency treatment. Ms Patkar and others were examined by Dr. Prakash Amte, son of Baba Amte.

Ms Patkar broke down in tears while talking to reporters about the plight of the people in the Valley. During a short press conference in which she barely managed to whisper out words, Ms Patkar said "I am happy at the way things have progressed so far. No qualm even if I die because I know the people of the Valley have learnt how to protect themselves and fight for justice." She said the achievement of the Andolan was that the entire Narmada Valley had risen to protest against the dam and some 'soft spots', where the Andolan did not have much influence, had also joined the stir over the last one month.

When asked about the pre-condition put by the Andolan for talks with the Government, Ms Patkar broke down in tears, saying "if we want to live, you call that a pre-condition". She said it was clear that talks with the Government would have no meaning unless the irreversible work on the dam stops.

She said the current phase of the agitation was "the last struggle for survival of the people of the Valley and there is no question of going back now". She said a significant feature of the movement was that farmers and Adivasis had joined together to fight the battle. "Now if an Adivasi village comes under submergence first, I am sure that all the farmers from the Valley will rush to the village".

Talking to reporters, Baba Amte said the Andolan had so far progressed along 'expected lines'. However, he said the agitation will have to be strengthened further to force the Government to sit and take notice. He said "ours was never meant to be a sterile agitation, we have not come here for suicide", he said "if something happens to Medha and others, things will go out of hand". He said "it is still not too late for the Government to realise the feelings of the people of the Valley and to initiate a dialogue with them".

The mood in the anti-dam camp was rejuvenated with fresh arrival of people from the Valley. About 100 members of the Dawoodi Bohra community from Barwani came with a bus load of provisions for the oustees who had been camping on the border. An Andolan spokesperson said protests were held in scores of the villages and towns today. In most of the villages, the call for 'chulha bandh' had total support.

Meanwhile, leading lawyer from Ahmedabad Girishbhai Patel made proposal to the Gujarat Government to send its representatives to the border on January 26 to explain to the oustees the rehabilitation measures proposed by it. He said the representatives should klear the doubts in the minds of the oustees and openly discuss the issue with the people.

Indian Express
January 26, 1991

# Amte's 'no' to talks, wants total review

Our Special Correspondent
in New Delhi

BABA AMTE has turned down water resources minister Manubhai Kotadia's invitation for talks on the Narmada dam, saying that his demand was for a total review of the project and not simply its rehabilitation and environmental aspects.

In a letter to the minister in response to his invitation for talks, Baba Amte said he was surprised to learn that Dilip Singh Bhuria, MP from Madalia, had told him that he (Baba Amte) had some suggestions to offer in the context of resettlement of the project-affected persons and measures for environmental improvement in the Narmada basin.

"My discussions with Bhuria were not regarding mere suggestions for improvement or implementation — rather they were on the need to review the entire project and to stay irreversible work in relation to the dam while the review is on," Amte said in the letter written from Ferkuva on the MP-Gujarat border where he is on fast against the project.

Baba Amte said time and again, the Narmada Bachao Andolan had stated that the very viability of the Sardar Sarovar Project was questionable and that therefore there was need for a review.

"If you or others central government representatives are open to discussions on reviewing the project, the Andolan representatives can certainly come to meet you," Baba Amte said in reply to Kotadia's letter.

FERKUVA: Meanwhile, tribals rallying behind the Narmada Bachao Andolan in the Narmada valley, yesterday swore not to move from their villages to be submerged by the Sardar Sarovar Project and joined the one-day fast by social activist Baba Amte.

The people in the valley also declared their intention of launching a programme of total non-cooperation, should anything happen to the Andolan leaders whose condition remained precarious on the 18th day of their indefinite fast yesterday.

Independent
January 26, 1991

# Police get tough with dam activists

**The Times of India News Service**

FERKUVA, January 27.

JEEPLOADS of policemen, some of them with Sten guns, ambulances with government doctors and senior government and police officers arrived here late at night, on January 25 with the stated intention of enquiring about the health of the leader of the anti-dam agitation, Ms Medha Patkar.

With the Gujarat police in riot gear cordoning off their side and the Madhya Pradesh police ranged before the pandal where the activists are on fast, the supporters of the agitation quickly surrounded Ms Patkar and the others to ward off any bid to forcibly take them away.

Spotlights were trained on the area while the Madhya Pradesh side was jammed with a long row of vehicles, including ambulances and two buses. The Jhabua district collector, Mr J.S. Mathur, and Mr Surjit Singh, the inspector general of police, Indore, told the Narmada Bachao Andolan members that they had come to see whether Ms Patkar's condition was serious and whether she needed medical aid.

Representatives of the Andolan led by Mr Girishbhai Patel told them that they were fully aware of the gravity of the situation and would take Ms Patkar to hospital themselves if the need arose. Dr Prakash Amte, Baba Amte's son was checking her regularly and if further medical attention was needed, she would get it, he said. They had hospitalised two people earlier and at that time there was no such concern on the government's part. They protested against the government's callous attitude earlier.

Mr Mathur and Mr Singh demanded to know why the Andolan was against the government officers examining her. The state government would not allow anyone to die, Mr Mathur told this paper. He had come here the previous evening and the doctors had informed him that Ms Patkar's health was deteriorating. The government doctors were not allowed to examine Ms Patkar and that was why they had to come back. He had come that evening as well and was told by higher authorities that her condition should be examined. Mr Singh said force would be used if necessary as the Andolan had refused to allow government doctors in the past to examine Ms Patkar.

Mr Patel and the others demanded that the police be withdrawn before any further talks and after some hesitation, the collector agreed and the police were moved back. However, Mr Singh said the police were not animals to be treated like this. "They are not standing here naked", he said, objecting to the move.

When the Andolan told him that their experience with the police was bad, referring to the beating up of the activists near Baba Amte's camp by the Gujarat police, Mr Singh said, "I am telling you it will be repeated. You do not know what police pressure is like," he told the representatives in response to their statement that the police were disturbing the fasting activists. "You are giving us tension, instead of the other way round, by sitting on the road for so many days," he retorted.

After the police were moved out, Dr Amte examined Ms Patkar and told the government doctors that her health was not giving any cause for concern on the 21st day of hunger strike. The government doctors seemed satisfied that she did not need hospitalisation.

Mr Singh threatened two persons video-filming the proceedings, including Mr Yukio Tanaka, of the Friends of the Earth, Japan. He said their cameras would be taken away if they continued filming. Photographers were also prevented from using their cameras.

The entire drama which lasted for an hour and a half ended a little after midnight on January 26. Addressing the supporters and activists, Ms

**(Continued on Page 6)**

# Police get tough with activists

**(Continued from Page 1)**

Patkar said it was ironic that this incident should take place when the country was celebrating its 42nd Republic Day. She condemned the use of police to terrorise people who were staging a peaceful agitation for the right to life.

In a separate incident at Badwani on January 25, where people had organised a road blockade, police beat up villagers on two occasions and dismantled their bullock carts which they had used to block roads. According to the Laxmi Narayan Gupta of Badwani, road blockades were organised on that day in several areas in the valley as part of a solidarity action. In the morning, people from adjoining village assembled at Segaon, one km from Badwani, with their bullocks motorcycles and cycles and blocked traffic for over an hour after 9 am. The police came in and asked them to leave and when they did not, the police used their lathies to disperse the crowd.

Several people were injured in the incident and the police united the bullocks from the carts and chased the animals away. They confiscated the vehicles. When the villagers regrouped in the afternoon after more people gathered from elsewhere the police, this time under the guidance of the SP from Khargone with increased reinforcements, used lathis to disperse the mob. After that the whole of Badwani was closed. Mr Gupta said the mounted police had been sent to villages to terrorise people and get them to stay at home.

Two persons who were seriously injured have been admitted to the local hospital. Sriram from Bagud village fell unconscious from his injuries and was given oxygen. His head had been x-rayed and is still in hospital. Radheshyam, another villager from Bagud who was looking for his bullocks in the evening was allegedly beaten up by the police and later admitted to hospital. Both have been chained to bed with handcuffs.

The traffic to Indore and Baroda was considerably affected as a result of the blockade at Chikaldha, Kukshi, Bakaner, Manawar, Sondhul and other areas in Dhar and Khargone districts.

The people also boycotted the Republic day functions. The subdivisional magistrate at Badwani, Mr B. Agrawal, taking time off from a cricket match on R-day said the people decided to have the blockade without prior intimation. "We merely asked them to move and when they did not, mild caning was resorted to." He denied reports that there was a lathicharge and said vehicles were brought to the police station. About 20 people were arrested, including Mr Nanaksingh Gandhi, a local leader. Some substantive offences were registered against the people, Mr Agrawal said, as they threw stones on state transport buses. They were trying to disturb peace, he added.

The Special Armed Forces in Badwani who were there for some other purpose were used to bring the situation under control, he said. When asked how mild caning could have caused serious injuries, he said the people were putting up a show and were not hurt.

To a question on why the two people injured were chained to their beds, he expressed surprise and said it was violative of the law and he would look into it. About 23 bullock carts, 15 motocycles and 37 cycles are at the police station, he added.

The police on the same day broke the sankalp stambhs erected at Bagud and Kasrawad saying they were on government land and were therefore considered encroachments.

Times of India. 28 Jan, 91

Independent 29 Jan, 91

# Narmada activists end fast

Nachiketa Desai

in Ahmedabad

SOCIAL activist Medha Patkar and four other representatives of the Narmada Bachao Andolan ended their 22-day-old fast yesterday following an appeal from various voluntary organisations.

However, they announced they would continue their agitation against the Sardar Sarovar project in the Narmada Valley.

An NBA spokesman said the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra, which had started from Badwani in Madhya Pradesh on December 25 and had been stopped at Ferkuva on the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border by the police, would be wound up within a few days as "there is no point in staging a dharna before the insensitive Gujarat government any longer."

NBA activists will now fan out in the project-affected villages of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra to consolidate their organisation and launch an agitation on the pattern of the struggle being waged since four years by the people of Baliapal in Orissa against the missile testing range.

In the next phase of their agitation, project-affected villagers of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra will not allow any government officials to enter their villages. "We will run our own government in these villages," said a villager accompanying the yatra.

Patkar and other fasting leaders were given fruit juice by eminent social worker Baba Amte at 1.30 pm on Monday. A public meeting was then held at which NBA leaders announced their resolve to continue their struggle against the project.

The fast was broken following a joint appeal by former justice Krishna Iyer, University Grants Commission chairman Yashpal and former auditor and comptroller general of India T N Chaturvedi.

Three of the activists had to be shifted to hospital during the second week of the fast following a sharp deterioration in their health.

Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes commissioner B D Sharma was gheraoed allegedly by pro-Narmada activists here on Saturday when he was on his way to Chhota Udepur.

Times of India 28 Jan, 91

# Narmada dam activists call off stir

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan 28.

THE indefinite fast by Ms Medha Patkar and four other representatives of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), started 22 days ago at the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border near Ferkuva, was broken today with the formation of a citizen's committee to look into the demands of the Andolan. A solidarity relay fast being observed by NBA members in the capital was also called off today.

According to NBA activists in Delhi, the indefinite fast was in protest against the Gujarat government's unconstitutional use of police power and legal restrictions, and against its active incitement to a confrontation between the people of Gujarat and the anti-Narmada activists. It was also started to press for the NBA's demand of a review of the Narmada dam project and its effect on local tribes, villages and the environment.

With the breaking of the fast, the ongoing jan vikas sangharash yatra has also been called off. The yatra had been taken out to call for a review of the Narmada project but had not been allowed by the government to enter Gujarat.

# Tribals' new vow against dam

FERRUVA, Jan. 27 (PTI): Tribals and peasants in the Narmada valley, under the Narmada Bachao Andolan banner, have taken a new vow, "our village, our rule", implying they would not allow themselves to be uprouted by the Sardar Sarovar project.

Representatives of the villages destroyed a symbol of the destructive dam (the Narmada dam) and buried it after taking the pledge to intensify their struggle against the project with renewed vigour.

People from the tribal belt continued to pour into the anti-Narmada camp on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border, swelling its ranks.

The condition of the Andolan's leaders on indefinite fast deteriorated further, while appeals came to them from several prominent personalities to end the fast.

In a joint statement, the prominent personalities, including Swami Agnivesh, cine actress Ms Shabana Azmi, the noted journalist Mr Pritish Nandy, and the former planning commission members, Mr L. C. Jain and Mr Rajani Kothari, made the appeal for ending the fast.

The veteran Sarvodaya leaders, Mr Jagdishbahi Sham and Mr Thakurdas Bang too have made an appeal to call off the indefinite fast.

Time. of India. 28 Jan, 91

# Narmada issue deadlocked

Tushar Bhatt

AHMEDABAD 28 JANUARY

THE confrontation in the Yelling Fields of Ferkuva, on Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border, between the opponents and the supporters of the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) on the river Narmada, has now degenerated into a prestige issue, with neither side willing to emerge anything less than victorious. The confrontation is now a month-old and all efforts to bring the two sides to a negotiating table have so far failed.

The obstinacy of the Narmada Bachao Andolan activists has been more than matched by the rigidity on the other side. But, it would be simplistic to put it down merely to what has been described as "brute" authority of the Chimanbhai Patel government in Gujarat.

The emotion-charged atmosphere in Gujarat over the Narmada has been a political reality that was recognised even before the advent of Mr Patel in Gandhinagar. Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, was impelled by the strong public opinion in favour of the SSP in Gujarat to plump for it. Mr V. P. Singh, while fighting to dethrone Mr Gandhi, had to clarify that he did not mean to stop the project when he obliquely spoke about a review in a magazine interview.

The reason for this emotive state of affairs is that the Narmada project has been hanging fire for nearly four decades, serving as a sore reminder of the perceived political inability of the rulers in Gandhinagar to get it through even as the people suffered from what looked like worsening droughts. In fact, on April 5, 1961, Jawaharlal Nehru, the then prime minister, had laid the foundation stone of the Navagam dam on the river but the project remained on paper, having got stuck in an inter-state dispute among Gujarat, M.P., Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

Even if the public opinion was not as roused as it is over the SSP, it would have been very tough indeed for any government to abandon the SSP at this stage. Officials say that as at the end of December, 1990, a sum of Rs 1,930 crores had already been spent on the project. In addition, there are some 50 on-going contracts, involving antoher Rs 1,250 crores or so. They say that contracts worth Rs 400 crores are in the pipeline.

Not only a lot of construction has been undertaken, the main canal — as big as a river — has progressed nearly a hundred kilometres away from the project. All this would go waste. Plus, the government would incur huge liabilities because contractors would advance claims for idle time, investment of on machinery and man-power, were the project to be aborted now.

There have been acts of omission and commission on both sides. The Andolan activists, by insisting on stoppage of work on the dam, have been demanding something that at this stage of the project no government would entertain. The government of Mr Patel, on the other hand, over-reacted to the threat supposedly posed by Baba Amte and his associates. The counter-demonstration organised in support of the project after the state government decided not to allow the Sangharsha Yatra to proceed to the dam site has been noisy and on the offensive.

However, to dismiss the pro-dam feelings as merely orchestrated by the government would tantamount to giving too much of credit to Mr Chimanbhai Patel. He certainly had all the political reasons in the world to harp on the threat posed by Baba Amte; the oft-recurring communal riots, the challenge from within the ruling Janata Dal in Gujarat, the uneasiness in the Congress (I) over the wisdom of its national leadership to sustain Mr Patel as chief minister with outside support. The SSP represents a cause about which no political group in the State would dare utter a note of discord.

This would explain why Mr Patel has been so enthusiastic in mobilising a counter-demonstration. His wife, Mrs Urmilaben Patel, has actually been leading the pro-SSP camp at Ferkuva. Nevertheless, it would be telling only a part of the story were the whole thing to be put down as Mr Chimanbhai Patel's personal crusade for political survival.

It is also pertinent to note that no government in Gandhinagar would have been able to countenance the demand of the Andolan activists. Ever since its formation in 1960, the people of Gujarat have nursed a feeling of injustice at the hands of the Center. Regional aspirations have soared all over the country in the wake of the formation of linguistic states and the political horse-trading led to a general feeling, not only in Gujarat but in most non-Hindi belt states, that the federal structure tended to ignore the claims for economic development of those not living in the Hindi heartland. In Gujarat, politicians have for long suffered from the slur of being light-weights in Delhi and in support were cited projects like the SSP which had remained bogged down in controversies.

This is not to argue that the feelings are justified. It is merely to underline that they exist and have been in the past ten years aggravated. What is happening in States like Assam is only an extreme manifestation of the malaise.

Second, Mr Chimanbhai Patel has run his Janata Dal (JD) more or less as a regional party. He was one of the earliest proponents of regionalism, having fought the state assembly elections in 1975 on the platform of a regional party, the Kisan Mazdoor Lok Paksha, just a year after his ouster in the wake of the marathon Nav Nirman agitation. Even today, the Gujarat JD is some sort of an anachronistic unit; it supports the Chandra Shekhar government of the Janata Dal (S) in the Centre even though the party nationally opposing Mr Shekhar bears the name of Janata Dal. Mr Patel has deftly deflected all efforts to get his state unit the name of JD(S).

So, there is all the political necessity for him to champion the cause of SSP as ferociously as he can. The political perception, however, appears to have concealed from those outside the State the harsh reality that even if these calculations did not exist, it would be well-nigh impossible to abandon the SSP at this juncture.

The truth is that the Narmada Bachao Andolan has probably acted far too late to achieve its goal of stopping the SSP. It can only hope to get a better rehabilitation package for those uprooted by the Navagam dam, and draw a very valuable lesson that the time to oppose a Tehri or a Narmada dam is not after the execution of the project begins but before it passes through the scrutiny of institutions like the Union government or the Planning Commission.

The Patel ministry is in mood to accept the basic demand for a review of the SSP, considers the issue like height of the dam as closed and is going full-steam ahead.

The month-long confrontation between the pro-and-anti-dam groups has generated bitterness on both the sides in such a measure that piecemeal efforts at finding a negotiated settlement have been unsuccessful. The indefinite fast by Ms Medha Patkar and her colleagues against the dam has only deepened the bitterness. The anti-dam activists have taken a pledge to continue their stir; and so have the supporters of the dam.

Economic Times, Bombay, 29 Jan. 91

# Medha Patkar ends fast, to continue stir

From Our Correspondent

New Delhi, Jan. 28: Ms Medha Patkar and four other members of the Narmada Bachao Andolan today broke their 21-day-old fast at Ferkuva with the resolve to go back to the Valley and resume their struggle for a review of the Sardar Sarovar Project in a more" organised and intense" fashion. Two others who were also fasting had been hospitalised earlier.

Simultaneously, the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra led by Baba Amte was also called off and all those camping on the Madhya Pr sh border with Gujarat near Ferkuva withdrew today.

Environmental groups in the capital, who are closely associated with the andolan, said the breaking of the fast was a tactical retreat and Ms Patkar and other leaders of the agitation will now call upon the tribals living in the submergence zone of the big dam not to vacate their villages till the government concedes their demand. That stage may still be a long way off—probably three to four years—but, whenever it happens, it may be a final and forceful weapon to bring the government to the negotiating table.

For the time being, however, the decision to give up the fast is likely to be seen by the proponents of the dam as a defeat for the anti-dam lobby as the Narmada Bachao Andolan had declared before starting their long march into Ferkuva that this was the final phase of their agitation and they would not withdraw till they achieved something substantial.

Addressing a press conference today, Mr Ashish Kothari of the andolan admitted that they had undertaken the fast at the wrong time because the political situation was not amenable to an independent initiative at any compromise. He, however, added that the andolan had only said that this was the beginning of their final phase of the agitation.

Mr Kothari said the andolan was left with no choice in the face of an "obdurate, anti-people and anti-democratic stance" of the Gujarat chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, who turned down several independent initiatives for a compromise which would have ensured the present share of water to the state but reduced the submergence area of the dam.

Ms Patkar, who developed symptoms of kidney-failure, fainted twice in the last few days and lost 11 kgs of weight, was requested by the representatives of 70-odd tribal villages from the submergence zone to give up her fast in the larger interest of carrying on the agitation further.

Mr N.D. Jayal and Ms Indira Ramesh of Intach, who returned here from Ferkuva today, said the tribals were in high spirits and did not suffer from any sense of defeat. "I am sure," said Mr Jayal "that the people's voice will finally prevail and the right of the people to be consulted in decisions which affect their lives will not be allowed to be swept away by the governments."

Mr Smitu Kothari of the Narmada Bachao Andolan said the long march and the long fast had shaken the people's conscience and exposed the Gujarat government's anti-people stance. He clarified that the andolan was not anti-Gujarat as was being made out by the Gujarat government and all that they wanted was a review of the dam, which was not going to remedy the situation in the drought-affected areas of the state. They would favour any alternative arrangement which would alleviate Gujarat's problems and reduce the sufferings of the tribals.

Telegraph. 29 Jan, 91

# Narmada activists end fast

Nachiketa Desai

in Ahmedabad

SOCIAL activist Medha Patkar and four other representatives of the Narmada Bachao Andolan ended their 22-day-old fast yesterday following an appeal from various voluntary organisations.

However, they announced they would continue their agitation against the Sardar Sarovar project in the Narmada Valley.

An NBA spokesman said the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra, which had started from Badwani in Madhya Pradesh on December 25 and had been stopped at Ferkuva on the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border by the police, would be wound up within a few days as "there is no point in staging a dharna before the insensitive Gujarat government any longer."

NBA activists will now fan out in the project-affected villages of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra to consolidate their organisation and launch an agitation on the pattern of the struggle being waged since four

Independent 30.1.91

years by the people of Baliapal in Orissa against the missile testing range.

In the next phase of their agitation, project-affected villagers of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra will not allow any government officials to enter their villages. "We will run our own government in these villages," said a villager accompanying the yatra.

Patkar and other fasting leaders were given fruit juice by eminent social worker Baba Amte at 1.30 pm on Monday. A public meeting was then held at which NBA leaders announced their resolve to continue their struggle against the project.

The fast was broken following a joint appeal by former justice Krishna Iyer, University Grants Commission chairman Yashpal and former auditor and comptroller general of India T N Chaturvedi.

Three of the activists had to be shifted to hospital during the second week of the fast following a sharp deterioration in their health.

Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes commissioner B D Sharma was gheraoed allegedly by pro-Narmada activists here on Saturday when he was on his way to Chhota Udepur.

Times of India. 30 Jan, 1991

# Stir withdrawal setback for Amte

The Times of India News Service

BHOPAL, January 29: The end of the sangharsh yatra of the Narmada Bachao Andolan at Ferkuva on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border, without any breakthrough in the Narmada project stalemate is a clear setback for Baba Amte, Ms Medha Patkar and other leaders of the agitation.

The Madhya Pradesh government, which has been bearing the brunt of the anti-Narmada agitation for several years, is satisfied with the outcome of the agitation. These weeks have proved that the people who are going to be affected by the project are not with these environmentalists, observed a government spokesman.

Indeed, the Patwa government's attitude towards Baba Amte has virtually bordered on contempt. On several occasions, Mr Patwa has personally questioned the Baba's credentials on the Narmada issue.

But the failure of the agitation to bring about any change in the attitude of the governments of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh augurs ill for the oustees. Despite its shortcomings, the agitation has been able to build up public opinion in favour of a suitable rehabilitation programme for the oustees.

Given the track record of the state governments with regard to rehabilitation programmes, it is more likely that they will lapse into their usual slackness if public pressure wanes.

On its part, the Madhya Pradesh government did virtually nothing to foil the agitation.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at New Delhi
January 28, 1991

*INDEFINITE FAST BROKEN: YATRA TERMINATED:*
*CITIZENS' COMMITTEE SET UP*

Fast and Yatra Called Off:

The indefinite fast of Medha Patkar and four other representatives of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, started 22 days ago at the Madhya Pradesh - Gujarat border near Ferkuwa, has been broken today. With that, the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra has also been called off. The people on fast will be given food by representatives of the villages threatened by submergence by the Sardar Sarovar Project.

The indefinite fast by 7 representatives of the Andolan was begun on January 7, 1991, in protest against the Gujarat Government's unconstitutional use of police power and legal restrictions, and against its active incitement to a confrontation between the people of Gujarat with the Sangharsh Yatris. It was also started to press the Andolan's demand for a review of the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP).

However, as the fast progressed and the health of these 7 people deteriorated, it became amply clear that the Gujarat Government was unwilling to listen to reason. Chimanbhai Patel, Gujarat Chief Minister, not only rejected the Andolan's demands without a consideration of their legitimacy, but also brushed aside several attempts at mediation and resolution of the ensuring stalemate.

Simultaneously, both Chimanbhai as well as Sunderlal Patwa, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, consistently spread all kinds of canards about the movement (e.g. that it was foreign funded, and incited by foreign powers who do not want India to progress; that the Yatris were not representative of those to be affected by the Project; that they were being paid money to stay in the yatra, etc.). Shri Patwa took an outrightly hostile position, questioning the very right of the Andolan activists to protest, and condoning brutal police action on Nimadi villagers who were peacefully expressing their solidarity with the Yatra.

Almost the entire Gujarati media, obviously under pressure from the Government, not only blacked out the Andolan's viewpoint or even liberal voices in Gujarat itself but worse, spread the most scurrilous of misinformation. The declining health status of those on fast seemed to have little effect on the insensitive political climate of these states and the Centre; nor did the urging of hundreds of groups and prominent people from all over India.

In the Narmada Valley, the response to the fast was quite the opposite. A wave of indignation and anger at the state's unresponsive attitude to peaceful protest swept through the SSP submergence zone and surrounding areas. A new boost was given to the spirit of the Valley's people, in their resolve to fight against the destruction threatened by the SSP. This was especially witnessed during the last few days of the fast, when thousands of people came to join the Sangharsh Yatra camp at the Gujarat- M.P. border, or demonstrated their support and resolve in various actions such as 'rasta-roko' and closure of 'chulhas' all over the Valley.

Simultaneously, the citizens of the rest of the country have given an overwhelming response to the Sangharsh Yatra. This is witnessed by the wide range of groups, movements, and individuals from all over the country who participated in the Yatra, or held support actions in their own areas.

It is in view of this response, which is indicative of the fact that the Yatra and the indefinite fast have served to shake the conscience of the nation, and galvanised a process of joint struggle across the country, that the fast is being broken. The Yatra too is being withdrawn, with the resolution, taken by thousands of representatives of several dozen villages in the submergence zone of SSP, to intensify the struggle in the Narmada Valley itself. They have repeated their determination not to move out of their homes and land, come what may. The precise next steps of the Andolan will be announced in the next few days.

## Citizens' Committee Set Up

Simultaneous to the decision to break the fast, news has come of a significant citizens' move to look into the demands of the Andolan. Justice Krishna Iyer, former Judge of the Supreme Court, has been trying to intervene to break the stalemate for quite some time. Finally, it is learnt that together with Prof. Yash Pal (Chairman, UGC), and Dr. T.N. Chaturvedi (former Comptroller and Auditor General of India) a Citizen's Committee has been set up by Justice Iyer. This Committee will reportedly undertake a thorough review of the displacement and rehabilitation situation as well as the status of various environmental studies and action plans of SSP. The Committee members had yesterday appealed to the Andolan representatives to break their fast, and assist them in their task. They are also believed to have appealed to the state governments to provide all assistance for the early completion of the study.

## Pledge-taking, and Breaking of Delhi Relay Fast

Since January 10, a relay fast and dharna have been held by support groups of the Narmada Bachao Andolan in Delhi, in solidarity with the indefinite fast. These are today being called off, in view of the breaking of the fast at Ferkuwa. It is notable that over 300 individuals from a wide range of groups and affiliations took part in, or expressed support for, this action - this included members of social action groups, trade unions, environmental groups, human rights groups, artists, academics, scientists, journalists, women's groups, and others.

To express their resolve to continue their support to the struggle in the Narmada Valley, as also similar struggles elsewhere, and their determination to fight for a just and sustainable society, members of these groups are taking a pledge after a public meeting on the issue.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Sangharsh Village, Ferkuwa.
30-1-91

PRESS RELEASE by Medha Patkar

The tribals and peasants of the Narmada Valley have now no questions to ask nor any answers to get. This Sangharsh Yatra of ours itself has provided answers to all our questions. We no longer ask for the review of the project, nor are we interested in any negotiations or discussions with any of these governments about how best to destroy and annihilate us. We no longer demand or expect anything from such callous and insensitive governments. We have now finally decided that we will ourselves assert and defend our basic right to life, justice and harmonious and sustainable development. We will fight in our homes, fields and forests from the village to the valley. It is through an inherent and inalienable right of self-defence that we will uphold, realise and secure our basic rights.

Now that the insensitivity, immorality, illegality, and unconstitutionality of the official 'response' is more than exposed, it becomes our prime duty not to rely either on the 'constitution on paper' or 'laws in books' but to defend our rights and lives both. The fight ahead has to be fought and won with the only resolve now, 'Our Village, Our Rule'.

It is this determination expressed by the people in the valley, appealing to me and my communion with them that has touched my heart and conscience, and made me with the other four colleagues, break the fast on its twenty second day. This decision is not a retreat but a move forward into the next phase of a more determined, fiercer and wider struggle on the land. At this juncture, our commitment cannot be to the Valley alone but also to the thousands of poor and down-trodden, including those in Gujarat, our mute supporters.

The fast has certainly made our strength grow several times. When the rulers have neither an answer to our question, nor any commitment towards the basic constitutional duty of protecting their own tribal brethren and the dedicated tillers of the soil, the Andolan, I believe, has to retract every appeal it had made, every demand that was raised with a genuine commitment for the review of the disastrous SSP. The struggle ahead is the struggle of self defence, self-reliance and self-governance.

No more do we beg for the stoppage of work on the Project. We would rather watch with our eyes open the 'destructive wall' coming up and stretch our own strength and unity to an utter irreversibility and invincibility, that would never allow our life and life support to get drowned into the Sardar Sarovar.

Narmada Bachao Andolan has been able to give rise to a number of moves unprecedented in the history of social movements in this country. The Independent Initiative taken by Ex-Justice V.K. Krishna Iyer, T.N. Chaturvedi (Ex-Comptroller and Auditor General), and Prof. Yash Pal (Chairman, UGC), announcing their decision to stand between the people and the government, and to review the issues raised by the Andolan, basic to the integrity and sustainability of the human and natural resources of our country too will be equally unique and unparalleled

It is with such a deep faith in the empowered people of the Narmada Valley and the gram-raj that would show a path towards Jan-Vikas that I am returning with the people to the bountiful Valley.

Medha Patkar

BABA AMTE'S PRESS STATEMENT at Ferkuwa, Gujarat
January 30, 1991 (Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary).

We are leaving Gujarat with silent fidelity. We treated the people of Gujarat with conscience and courtesy. The Shanti Yatra fled lonely. We saw a snapshot of hypocrisy. The wife of the Chief Minister obstructed us with her hired protesters and Gram Raksha Dal jawans. Privileged connections should not obstruct justice. We never wanted to confront the people of Gujarat. We don't violate even the tutored will of the people. In the name of Shanti Yatra they are inflicting cruel wounds upon humanity. We offer you our sincere salutation.

I assure you I have a heart worthy of your friendship. I kiss the soil of Gujarat before leaving it with a plentiful effusion of tears. I saw the volcanic eruption of energy for defending the concern of SSP. I am afraid I see the figure of Kutch and Saurashtra mourning over this tomb of Sardar Sarovar. Their convulsive energy of hunger and thirst cannot be pacified by SSP. Thirst is more eloquent than words. It cannot be quenched by counterfeit truth and propaganda.

I issue this warning with words which when pulled at chords will ring true and clear: stop this dedicated destruction.

Today, on this Martyr's Day, we pay homage to you Bapu, to your wisdom which has no nationality, to your concept of humanism which meant absolute commitment to compassion, human warmth and peace. We repeat our oath never to forget you and your ideals. We will never abandon our resolve to rise again. We cannot imagine in your country Narmada Valley being converted into a land of walking skeletons. We will challenge it with a voice that will be heard.

In Ferkuwa I saw the sun setting in Gujarat, but I was happy to see the moon rise on the opposite side, in the valley. That moon is beckoning me. I will continue to struggle with patience, perseverance and with new vigour and vitality. I cannot offer to the people of Gujarat anything but love.

Medha Patkar and her brave colleagues, whose name is uttered with reverence by thousands of adoring lips in the valley, will be the guiding light to the people.

I offered a sane vision of brotherhood to Chimanbhai and Patwaji. They are intoxicated with power and are drinking praise with bottomless appetite. Please do not perpetuate this folly. Stop your brute hunger for size.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN
PRESS STATEMENT
30th January, 1991.

On the 30th of January, 1991 - the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi who was only physically assassinated in 1948 - the high and noble values and principles for which Gandhiji lived, fought and died have been destroyed and buried by the fascist methods of the Gujarat Government, by the repressive measures of the M.P. Government and by the total non-concern and insensitivity of the Central government to the basic human issues raised by the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

It has helped us to transform the Sangharsh Yatra into a firm resolve and strong determination to continue the battle against the Sardar Sarovar Project and the anti-people, unjust, exploitative, authoritarian and unsustainable development model. We are not going back, but going forward with a new battle cry - (our village - our rule), and with the new goal of realising and actualising the values of freedom, justice and self government as enshrined in and cherished by our Constitution.

We are going to the Narmada valley with the understanding that we have exhausted all methods of rational discourse and open dialogue, or gentle persuasion cogent argument and moral pressure. Now no one can have any cause to blame us for our decisions to fight out in the valley to save our houses, lands, villages, communities, culture and our total life support system from the clutches of the aggressive development project of the SSP, to defend and protect our right to life and to uphold and ensure Constitutional values and human rights.

Our Sangharsh Yatra was not against the people of Gujarat, nor against the interests of Gujarat. It was in fact a clarion call to the people of Gujarat to join the Yatra to raise the basic questions - 'Development for whom and at whose cost? Who will decide about who will sacrifice?' and to fight for a new social order.

And yet, the Government of Gujarat adopted the fascist methods of continuing state repression, moneypower, religion and manipulable local newspapers to suppress the people's movement and sought to create a mass hysteria by misinforming, instigating and provoking people to violence. A peaceful Gandhian satyagraha was sought to be suppressed in order to serve narrow political ends.

The conduct of the M.P. government was equally bad. It adopted brutal repressive measures and showed total unconcern for the struggling people of all the three states. The Maharashtra government apparently remained a mute witness, while the Central government behaved like a prisoner of Chimanbhai Patel and exhibited a shameful indifference and insensitivity to the thousands of tribals and peasants asserting their right to life.

When the Governments - the products and protectors of the Constitution and human rights - became the devouring destroyers of the Constitution and the people's right to question, to dissent and to protest, there is now no sense in demanding and expecting anything from such callous and insensitive governments. We no longer ask for the review of the project, nor are we interested in any negotiations or discussions with any of these governments about how best to destroy and annihilate us. We have now finally decided that we will ourselves assert and defend our basic rights to life, justice and harmonious development.

We are going back to the valley with the fullest satisfaction that we have achieved what we had set out to achieve. We wanted our entire Narmada Valley to awaken and rise in revolt against the mass genocide known as the Sardar Sarovar, and to resolve to refuse to be the victims of development; and now the whole valley is united and determined. We wanted to challenge the three governments to come out and meet the people and convince them of the Governments' claims. And what we have found is that the Governments have neither the confidence nor the courage nor strength to do so. We wanted to raise the issue of basic demands of the project - affected people to national and international level and we have succeeded in arousing the nation and the world.

We wanted to show who are with the people and who are against the people. And we now know who in the nation are our friends of the poor, the exploited and suffering people and who are their enemies and what stuff they are made of, however exalted and eminent they may be. We wanted to bring our Constitution to the people and to make it a living law. And we now have our people actually realising their rights and making the Constitution a part of their day to day struggle. We wanted to teach the Gujarat Government that it would be prudent to stop the dam when only about 800 crores of rupees are claimed to have been spent. Now we will show the government by ensuring that the SSP remains an archaeological piece - a reservoir which could not be filled up because the people refused to go under the water. We came to Ferkuwa to gather strength, we are going back with thousand times strength. We wanted to raise the national conscience and we have an independent committee of three eminent persons of our country - Mr. Krishna Iyer, Prof. Yash Pal and Mr. T.N. Chaturvedi - to act as watchdogs of people's rights and to ask and challenge the rulers to justify their policies, programmes and projects to the people.

Now, we are on the new path - (our rule in our valley). The people have decided to launch a total non cooperation movement against the government. We will not allow any government official other than doctors and teachers to enter our village. We will not allow any construction work related to the SSP in the entire Ghati. We will not accept any rehabilitation or resettlement programme. Because we are convinced that no authority of power under our Constitution can displace us in the name of national interest or development, we will never be the victims of development.

* Thousands of people kept pouring in at Sangharsh Yatra site, from all over Narmada Valley. They came in trucks, buses, in tractors raising slogans, reaffirming their pledge at 'Sankalp Stambh' (Pillar of Resolve).

People observed five minutes 'moun' (silence) as a mark of the 'murder' of Gandhiji's values and principles by the governments of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and the Central government.

People proceeded to the valley in a procession and were welcomed at the main towns on the road and held roadside meetings. They had a major meeting at Badwani at late night and condemned the police atrocities in Badwani on 25th.

# Andolan leaders vow to carry on struggle

**Nachiketa Desai**

in Ferkuva

THE NARMADA Bachao Andolan, spearheading the agitation against the multi-crore Sardar Sarovar Project, yesterday wound up their Jan Vikash Sangharsh Yatra to "carry on their struggle in the Narmada valley till the last person drowns in the Narmada waters."

"We are going back to the Narmada valley with a new battle cry, *Hamara Gaon Hamara Raaj* (our village our rule) and with the new goal of realising the values of freedom, justice and self-government.

"We have exhausted all methods of rational discourse and open dialogue of gentle persuation and moral pressure," said social activist Medha Patkar winding up the Jan Sangharsh Vikas Yatra after a month-long sit-in dharna on the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border.

Welcoming the initiative taken by former supreme court judge justice Krishna Iyer, University Grants Commission chairman Yash Pal and former auditor and comptroller general of India T N Chaturvedi who have formed a fact-finding commission to probe the pros and cons of the project, Medha Patkar hoped that these eminent personalities would act as a watchdog of people's rights and challenge the rulers to justify their policies programmes and projects to the people.

She said the people of the Narmada valley had now decided to launch a total non-cooperation movement against the government. "We will not allow any government official other than doctors and teachers to enter our villages. We will not allow any construction work related to the SSP in the entire valley nor accept any rehabilitation or resettlement programme. We are convinced that no authority or power under our constitution can displace us in the name of national interest or development."

Thousands of people who had gathered at the Gujarat border to witness the beginning of the next phase of the Narmada Bachao Andolan observed five minutes silence to mourn the "murder" of Mahatma Gandhi's values and principles by the governments of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and the centre.

The NBA leader observed that the high and noble values for which Gandhiji lived and died have been destroyed and buried by the Fascist methods of the Gujarat government by the "repressive" measures of the Madhya Pradesh government and by the total non-concern and "insensitivity" of the central government to the basic human issues raised by the Sangharsh Yatra.

"Our yatra was not against the people of Gujarat nor against the interests of Gujarat. It was just to raise the basic question of development for whom and at whose cost and to fight for a new social order." The NBA leaders charged that the Gujarat government adopted Fascist methods of repression, used money power and religion, manipulated newspapers to suppress the people's movement.

"There is no sense in demanding and expecting anything from such callous and insenstive government. We no longer ask for the review of the project nor are we interested in any negotiations or discussions with any of these governments about how best to destroy and annihilate ourselves. We have now finally decided that we will ourselves assert and defend our basic rights to life, justice and harmonious development," the NBA leaders said.

Patkar expressed satisfaction over the fulfilment of the main objective of the Sangharsh Yatra which was to awaken the people of entire Narmada valley against what she described as "destructive" SSP. "We wanted to challenge the governments to come out and meet the people of the valley and convince them of their claims. But the governments had neither the confidence nor the courage to do so," she said.

Independent – Jan. 31, 91

## Amte returns national awards

FERKUVA, Jan 29, (PTI): The social activist, Baba Amte, has returned to the President, "Padma Shri" and "Padma Vibhushan" awards on Republic Day.

The Magsaysay award winner had announced on January 9 that he would return the awards, in protest against the inhuman treatment meted out to tribals by the Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh governments during the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

The awards were returned to the President by registered post, an Andolan spokesman said.

He welcomed the decision of Ms Medha Patkar to give up the fast on an appeal by tribals and leading citizens of the country and said her leadership was essential to guide the movement.

Times of India

## Amte withdraws dam dharna

INDORE, Jan. 30 (UNI): The veteran social worker Baba Amte, who was spearheading the agitation against construction of Sardar Sarovar dam in Gujarat on the Narmada river, today withdrew his month-long dharna near Ferkuva on the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border.

About 500 tribals from Madhya Pradesh, who were also staging dharna along with Baba Amte, have meanwhile, returned to chhota Kasravad near Badwani in Khargone district, where Baba Amte had set up his ashram.

Times of India, Jan. 31, 91

# Anti-dam activist quits law practice

The Times of India News Service

FERKUVA (Baroda Dist.), January 30. Mr Girish Patel, an advocate from Ahmedabad and an activist of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, has decided to give up his lucrative practice at the Gujarat high court and stay with the people in the Narmada valley to support their continued fight against the "destructive" Sardar Sarovar dam.

In a statement at the border village Mr Patel said when the right to live of the backward classes and poor had been threatened and all institutions — administrative, legislative, judicial and even voluntary — had been found wanting in "responsiveness, sensitivity, boldness, independence and courage and strength to stand by human freedom, fundamental right and constitutional values," he could not remain aloof and away from the struggling masses.

Later, Mr Patel said he had not yet decided where he would stay in the valley. It could be Maniveli, the first village in Madhya Pradesh to get submerged once the dam was completed, but he would stand by the people.

A similar pledge was also given by Dr B.D. Sharma, the central commissioner for scheduled castes and tribes, who said he would remain with the people. He, however, said he had no immediate plans.

Earlier, Dr Sharma was subjected to manhandling and abuses by the pro-Dam rallyists on Saturday when he had gone to Ferkuva village to make a telephone call to Mr Justice P.N. Bhagwati, retired chief justice of the supreme court, who had spoken to the Gujarat chief minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, on the Narmada issue.

Dr Sharma's car was stoned and abuses were hurled at him in the presence of some members of Parliament and the state assembly. He was saved by a couple of police officials.

Times of India 31 Jan '91

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Badhwani in MP.
SUMMING UP STATEMENT ON THE YATRA
4.2.1991

Sangharsh Yatra Returns With New Vigour, Firm Resolve and New Programme - Our Village, Our Rule.

The thirty six days of the Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra against the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) and the twenty one day long fast by the representatives of the Narmada Valley was a glorious chapter in the long drawn battle against the project and the prevalent anti-people model of development. On 30th January, on the death anniversary of the Father of the Nation, the Sangharsh Yatra was transformed into an all out war against the dam with the programme of 'hammaren gaaon men hamaaraa raaj' (our rule in our villages). The people resolved not to allow any dam related work and any dam related person in their villages. No more appeals to review the project, the peasants and the tribals thundered. They have decided to protect their right to life and their resources and the constitutional values henceforth. They vowed to carry on the fight in every village, every hamlet and every house. All the supporting organisations and the movements all over India pledged to take the fight in every nook and corner of India as the outcome of the battle in Narmada valley will decide whether the most under-privileged, the tribals, peasants, the backward classes have the right to life and at least the right to protest in this democratic polity.

The Sangharsh Yatra and the anti-rally sponsored by the government of Gujarat and the industrial-commercial, big landlord interests was a classic case study of how the polarisation takes place when the interests of the Establishment are under threat by the tribals, peasants and other toiling classes. The way the police, state, industrial-commercial interests tried to crush the Sangharsh Yatra indicates the future tendencies of these forces and their intolerance of any dissent. The fascist, anti-democratic and anti-poor nature of the response to the Sangharsh Yatra by the State should alert every democratic, egalitarian mind in the country, and all of us should now join to thwart the ugly designs of the established forces. The people in Narmada valley have resolved to fight it out till the end donning the responsibility not only of the Narmada valley, but the battle of every exploited valley, the poor and dammed of India. Here are some prominent aspects of the Jan Vikas Sangharsha Yatra;

* THE YATRA. Over two thousand men and women set out on the Long March on foot from Rajghat near Badwani from 25th December, 1990. The ranks went on swelling and was well over six thousand when the Yatra reached near the Gujarat border at Chandpur. Over three thousand tribals joined the Yatra on 29th December at Alirajpur. Most of them crossed the Narmada two days back;, they started walking from their villages and hamlets in the mountainous ranges of Satpuda. The people took their dal-ata, beddings, had village-wise tractors and subscriptions to provide for the not so well off from the villages. It was an inspiring sight when thousands of people treaded the meandering path towards the damsite. There were street plays, songs, bhajans mandalis, meetings in the wayside villages, wall writing campaign by the young enthusiasts from the valley. People camped at six places till they reached the Gujarat border, cooking the food in groups and sharing the grains.

At the Ferkuwa border, when the marchers were obstructed by the Gujarat police and the state sponsored pro-dam rally, the Sangharsh Yatris decided not to confront the people of Gujarat. A band of representatives from the valley, led by Baba Amte, went inside Gujarat to persuade the people there to have a dialogue with the anti-dam Yatra and allow the latter to proceed in order to exercise their democratic right to protest at the damsite.

However, the state and the self styled leaders of the non-governmental organisations moving in the Ambassador cars of the Narmada Nigam and the state government, adopted a queer argument. According to them, the entire Gujarat was one in favour of the dam, (which incidentally is not the case) therefore others have no right to protest. The Sangharsh Yatra leaders, including Medha Patkar, appealed to them to continue

their pro-dam campaigning as a parallel movement, but how could the dissenters be obstructed from expressing their dissent? they asked. This had become the issue of how and with what methods the social movements are to be carried out in the country. The self styled leaders of NGOs in Gujarat were setting a dangerous precedent for social movements in India.

Despite the hitch, a band of 28 representatives of the valley moved across Gujarat border, led by the veteran Baba Amte. The police there made an abominable attempt to stop Baba by using lady homeguards. When Baba pointed out to this shameful tactic in a later meeting with the Gujarat Minister for Narmada Development, Babubhai Patel, the Minister did not see anything wrong in it. Before the incident, over 140 protesters inside Gujarat boundary, who went there with tied hands, were attacked in the evening by the Gujarat police, after the lights were switched off and the music in the pro-dam camp was blaring full throated. In the noon before, women activists like Chittaroopa were manhandled and their clothes were torn by the police. Surprisingly enough, let alone the police, veteran pro-dam Gandhian, Chunni Bhai Vaidya, tried to save the police's skin by making counter allegations against the protesters. This shows the moral level of the pro-dam protesters.

After being thwarted, the Sangharsh Yatra stayed on for full one month, with a standing appeal to discuss the basic issues involved in the SSP, with any competent and authorised person from the government. The Yatra was launched with the aim to have a comprehensive review of the SSP taking into account all aspects and issues, with the stoppage of the irreversible work on the dam till such a review is complete. The irreversible works being the deforestation in the submergence zone and resettlement zone, the land acquisition and displacement process and the construction work in the river-bed. However, the Gujarat government and all the concerned governments were too adamant and scared to initiate any talk on these issues.

On 7th January, 1991, Medha Patkar and six representatives from the Narmada valley went on indefinite hunger strike to raise the entire issue on moral plane and to appeal to the conscience of the nation on the issues raised by the movement. Alongwith Medha Patkar, Shantaben (Pipree), Laxmiben (Piplud), Devrambhai (Kadmal) from Nimad region, Khajabhau Pawra from Akranti tehsil and Mathurbhai from Akkalkuwa tehsil of Maharashtra and Meghnad, a talented activist related with the tribals' movements in South Bihar went on this fast. Meghnad represented all the struggles spread in various parts of India.

As the indefinite fast continued, the health of Mathurbhai, Shantaben failed and they had to be shifted to hospital. Rama Atya Padvi, who replaced Mathurbhai also fell ill and had to be shifted to hospital. Medha Patkar's health deteriorated and she was unconscious twice and there was a danger of permanent damage to her kidneys. Meghnad too was critical. However, the failing health did not dampen the revolutionary spirit of the activists, as they sang every morning and Medha Patkar continued her incessant discussions till the twenty second day of the fast.

The situation became tense, in the night of 25th January, on the eve of Republic Day, when over three hundred police and the top police and administrative officials descended down on the Sangharsh Yatra camp to arrest Medha Patkar and others on fast. In the most immoral possible way, the police IG of Indore, one Surjit Singh, tried to browbeat the tribals and peasants who surrounded their comrades that night. At last the police had to beat a retreat after the medical check-up which they otherwise could have done without flexing their muscles. Interestingly enough, the Gujarat police too acceded to the demands of the M.P. police.

On the other side of the border, the pro-dam rallyists continued to play the dirty tricks of blaring loudspeaker and unbearable blaze. They did not allow Baba to sleep which hampered his health. Frequent complaints with the police and administration yielded no result. Interestingly, Mrs. Urmilaben Patel, wife of the Chief Minister, was at the helm of affairs in the pro-dam camp.

[illegible] The response from the Gujarat government, to say the least, was a [illegible] The government whipped up a mass hysteria taking into hand some servile Gujarati language newspapers, select non-governmental organisations and created a show as if the people of Gujarat opposed the anti-dam marchers. There were two government sponsored rallies. On 29th December, at Ferkuwa and on 18th January, 1991. The government, in connivance with the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Travel and Tour Association, Organisation of Cooperative Banks, Swaminarayan sect, various industrialist investors along with the state sponsored Narmada Foundation and Narmada Samarthan Abhiyan created a mass hysteria by spreading totally false news and parochialism with the help of language newspapers like Sandesh, Gujarat Samachar, Janmabhoomi and Loksatta. The language press literally crawled when asked to bend by the state.

The behaviour of Gujarati language press is really a cause for concern to all democratic forces. It spread disinformation, instigated the people against the Sangharsh Yatra by publishing unfounded stories amounting to defamation. It made Swami Agnivesh go underground and had 'investigative reports' about the serious differences between Baba and Medha Patkar, 'the free flowing liquor in Sangharsh Yatra and "hired" tribals in the Yatra.' The Andolan has lodged a detailed complaint against these newspapers with the Press Council of India.

Armed with servile press, non-governmental organisations, state machinery, co-opted Gandhians, the Chief Minister organised a 'put up' pro-dam rally and daily demonstrations against the Sangharsh Yatra. The pro-dam rally mostly constituted of the homeguards in civil dress and the youngsters from colleges. This fact was testified to by some discerning Gujarati journalists. On 29th Dec., 1990 people were brought in luxury buses, were fed by the food packets from Swaminarayan trust. It was a grand show put up jointly by the state, industrialists and religious sects. On 18th Jan., 1991 another rally was held where the CM reiterated his adamant stand of not having any dialogue with the Andolan.

However, slowly but steadily, the public opinion in Gujarat started tilting towards the Andolan. Renowned social workers in tribal area Madhusudan Mistry of 'Disha' organisation, Prof. Harshad Desai, Dalit Panther leader Waljibhai Parmar, Ashok Choudhury, Jyotibhai Desai openly came out in support of the Yatra. According to them those forces, who have been opposing the movements by Dalits, the backward classes and the minorities are behind the pro-dam hysteria. These forces have been instrumental in suppressing the people's movement in Gujarat.

Though the established forces in the state were inimical, the common people and the oppressed classes were supportive of the Yatra. People came from Chhota Udepur tribal belt, from the canal affected area, from Kevadia and even from Saurashtra to express solidarity for the Andolan. Inquilabi Communist Party, Chingari, Parivartan, Vadodara Kamdan Union, Gujarat Shramjivi Suraksha Council were some of the important participants in the rally. The former Gujarat Minister and the leader of Janata Dal in the state, Mr. Pravinsinh Jadeja came to meet the Yatris and had an hour of discussion with Medha Patkar and her colleagues. He conceded that the SSP will not solve the drinking water problem and the irrigation problem of the drought prone areas of Kutch - Saurashtra and North Gujarat. The water will, at the most, reach upto Gandhinagar, he said. According to him, Gujarat cannot afford to spend on SSP, the cost of which will shoot up to at least Rs.40,000 crores. He also conceded that Gujarat does not have land to provide for five acres to all the oustees. He accepted the fact that the conditions set by the Ministry of Environment were violated and the clearance now stands lapsed. He told the activists that the panacea for the water problem in Saurashtra lies in decentralised schemes, as Junagadh district will be able to satisfy all the needs of entire Saurashtra, if these decentralised schemes were given priority and implemented honestly.

The Government response was nil - or negative. Along with the Gujarat government the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister launched a vitriolic attack on the Andolan. Interestingly, the CM Mr. Patwa, is far off the reality when he debunks the Andolan. He boasted that not a single tribal and peasant from Madhya Pradesh participated in

the Sangharsh Yatra. The Yatris, from the villages and hamlets of Madhya Pradesh were visibly annoyed at the CM's remark. Some of them were staunch BJP workers and they expressed 'shame' over the senility of the Chief Minister.

Gujarat government sent its Chief Secretary to have a show of 'talks'. However, the officer was adamant and was not ready to discuss any of the basic issues raised by the Andolan. He merely wanted 'suggestions' on rehabilitation and environmental programme. The Gujarat CM threatened the Prime Minister and even humiliated the President of the Republic. It is notable that the President was shaky about his earlier stand when he suggested some modification in the structure of the dam to protect the rights of the tribals. It was a shameful episode, when the vested interests could humiliate the President and flout the Constitution of India. It was a challenge to democracy.

People, in and outside the valley, now fully understood the real nature of the powerholders, as one by one all were exposed and their anti-people convictions bared.

NATIONWIDE FIGHT: Throughout the Sangharsh Yatra, over one hundred and fifty organisations, institutions and movements all over India actively participated and expressed their solidarity. As the Yatra started, support programmes were held in Chhattisgarh, Bastar area in Madhya Pradesh, in Maharashtra Adivasi Sahitya Sammelan and Chhatrabharti expressed solidarity. On 27th Dec., 1990, over five hundred representatives from the tribals' organisations in India held a dharna in front of Rashtrapati Bhavan for the right to life and right over resources. Narmada was an important issue they adhered. Their delegation had meetings with the President and the Prime Minister on these issues.

Two fact finding missions arrived at Sangharsh Yatra site. One was sent by the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the other consisted of Jai Sen of National Campaign for Housing Rights and G. John of National Fishermen's Forum. Both teams were impressed by the issues, the organization and the approach of the Sangharsh Yatra and decried the Gujarat government and the Madhya Pradesh for deliberately neglecting the 'people's struggle'. Famous Jurist, V.R. Krishna Iyer supported the Yatra and its demand in a moving letter to Baba Amte. Scientists Satish Dhawan, A.K.N. Reddy too in a statement appealed to the government to open up dialogue with the Andolan. Mr. Iyer, Nikhil Chakravartty, P.N. Haksar submitted a letter to the President in support of the issues raised by the Andolan and appealed him to direct the government to start dialogue with the people's movement.

As the days went by, with the condition of the activists on fast further deteriorating, supporters of Narmada Bachao Andolan all over the nation issued appeals, assuring to take up the fight against the SSP in all earnest and on nationwide scale. They categorically told those on fast that the main aim of the Sangharsh Yatra has been fully achieved as it has shown that the entire Narmada valley is one against not only the SSP but also against every kind of exploitative and non-egalitarian development. It has raised the issue on moral plane and has been successful in impressing the need of the review of the SSP throughout the country. For a long term fight against the destructive development, they appealed to Medha Patkar and others to end the fast and assured their active participation in the renewed fight. The signatories included L.C. Jain, Rajni Kothari, Upendra Baxi, Swami Agnivesh, Pritish Nandy, Varavara Rao, of Council of Revolutionary Culture, Abdul Jabbar of Bhopal Gas-Pidit Mahila Udyog Sangathan, among others. Mr. Rajgopal of the Federation of Voluntary Organisations in M.P. has promised that the struggle of Narmada valley will now be launched in every part of M.P. jointly by the organisations spread all over the state.

Mass organisations from all over India actively participated in the Yatra. Chhatisgarh Mukti Morcha, Ekata Parishad, Prayog, Yuwa Gram, Madhya Pradesh Swaichhik Sanstha Sangh, Gramodaya Chetna Mandal, Bastar, Bhopal Gas Pidit Mahila Udyog Sanghatan (all from M.P.) Soshit Jan Andolan, Chhatrabharti, YUVA, Prakriti, INTACH, Stree Uvach, Nari Samata Manch, Vanrai-Nagpur, Jungal Bachao-Manav Bachao, (all from Maharashtra), Lok Adhikar Sangh, Shramjivi Swayamsamrakshan Council, Inquilabi

Communist Party, Parivartan, Chingari, Disha, Dalit Panther, several tribal groups (from Gujarat), Lokayan, Kalpavriksha, CEC, Alcon, INTACH, Nishant Natya Manch, Bandhua Mukti Morcha, (Delhi), Bombay Natural History Society, BAG, Save Bombay Committee, Rajasthan Kisan Sanghatan, NCHR Calcutta, JNU group-Delhi, Sahyadri from Kerala, Samaj Parivartana Samudaya, Samagra Vikas, CIEDS from Karnataka, Communist Gaadar Party-Bombay, were some of the groups who actively participated. Eklavya-Bhopal and Medicos Friends Circle, Indore too participated.

Apart from active participation, several prominent persons appealed for initiating a meaningful dialogue with the Andolan. While Sunderlal Bahuguna, Swami Agnivesh, Mrinal Gore came at the Yatra site and expressed solidarity, leaders like Piyush Tirkey, Atal Behari Vajpayee, Janardhan Yadav, Ramvilas Paswan, Bagun Sumrai, Sumati Oraon (all MPs) appealed for opening up dialogue with the Andolan. Famous Jain Muni Sushil ji also appealed from Bawangaja to initiate a dialogue with the Andolan.

EFFORTS TO MEDIATE: Several initiatives were taken during the period of indefinite fast to break the stalemate. The first such effort was by the delegation of the tribals' organisations which met the President, the Prime Minister and asked them to intervene. The Commissioner for SC/ST, Dr. B.D. Sharma, in his efforts wrote to the P.M. the President and the Attorney General of India. He also wrote to the Gujarat CM and the Governors of the three states. He maintained that the stalemate is a 'constitutional crisis' as the state is pitted against the tribals in this case. He called for a meaningful and dignified dialogue with the tribals and their representatives. He met the Governors of M.P. and Maharashtra. The governments of Gujarat and M.P. showed unwarranted hostility and the M.P. government demonstrated the petty attitude when it withdrew the police wireless facility to Dr. Sharma as a Constitutional authority. The Gujarat CM openly attacked the soothing role being played by Dr. Sharma.

An independent initiative by two renowned experts on water conservation too bore no fruit. Dr. K.R. Datye, consultant to various state governments and the World Bank on water conservation and Vilasrao Salunkhe, pioneer of the famous Pani Panchayat scheme of water conservation and distribution, alongwith Bhal Vaidya, senior socialist leader in Maharashtra, proposed a plan whereby the drought prone areas in Gujarat will get water minimising the human costs. An abortive attempt by Chunibhai Vaidya and Bombay based industrialist Damji Bhai Anchorwala did not get any response by Gujarat government. Justice Krishna Iyer too had talks with the Chief Secretary of Gujarat, but to no avail.

In a bid to test the honesty of the government, the Andolan did call for the complete rehabilitation plans from all the three concerned states and called on them to present the plans before the people at the Sangharsh Yatra site. It asked the governments to send competent persons with the plans to discuss with the people. But, no government dared to face the people and stand to the scrutiny of the nation.

On 28th January, when the five activists broke their fast, three prominent citizens of India declared themselves forming an independent 'Citizens' Committee' to look into the human aspect of the SSP. Justice Krishna Iyer, Prof. Yash Pal of University Grants Commission, and T.N. Chaturvedi, former Comptroller and Auditor General of India are the members of the committee. They declared that they will be going into the cost-benefit aspect and decision making process of the SSP, but above all they will be scrutinising all the aspects of the displacement in the SSP. They appealed to all the concerned governments, organisations and Andolan to cooperate with them and respond to their scrutiny. It seems that the pro-dam forces are scared of this scrutiny too.

THE VALLEY RISES: In a unique demonstration of the unity and determination to fight against the SSP, the villages and hamlets in Narmada valley continued their battle against the authorities in the valley as batches of hundreds of villagers kept on pouring into the Sangharsh Gaon - the site of the Yatra. Sangharsh Gaon, a unique settlement, where the Yatris made their temporary abode, had been buzzing with the day to day routine of a village. The coordinated arrangement of food, fuel, water,

communications and press bureau was admired by all. Rehmatullah and his young friends went on a wall-writing spree and had a lion's share in erecting the 'Sankalp Stambh' (pillar of resolve) on the M.P. - Gujarat border. People in the valley were so much used to their Sangharsh Gaon, that an engagement was also confirmed and celebrated during those trying days.

On 24th January, 'chulha bandh' (mass fast) was observed in the valley and in Sangharsh gaon. On 25th January, the entire valley was closed, as the villagers blocked six important routes at seven points, including the state highway of Khandwa-Baroda. The police resorted to unprovoked and unannounced lathicharge, twice, in Badwani and injured many women and children. The injured people, Shriram Jat and Radhey Shyam were kept in the hospital.with handcuffs and chains in the leg. Police used mounted force. Angered by the police brutality, Badwani was closed for two days and all the townspeople expressed solidarity with the Andolan.

On 28th and 30th January, bands of people from far off villages arrived at Sangharsh Gaon. They insisted that their Medha Jiji and other comrades withdraw the fast to wage 'an all out war against the demonic dam'. Organisations all over India assured to carry on the fight against the SSP in their region and on all India level. With an unsurpassable vigour and elan on the twenty second day of fast, Medha Patkar vowed to fight against the dam, now, 'with twenty one fold energy and determination'. Hereafter no demands and no appeals; nor will we ask for any review. Now we will protect ourselves, our right to life conferred by the Constitution. We will fight it out, despite the dam work going ahead. Now, no more will we care for whether the dam is complete or not. We will see how they dare drown us; we will see how they will build the dam. The fierce defiance was in the air as Medha, Meghnad, Khajabhau, Devrambhai, Laxmibai broke the fast on 28th January.

On 30th Jan., representatives from the valley went inside Gujarat boundary and brought back their Baba Amte to wage the war in the valley. 'On the death anniversary of the Father of Nation, all his values and principles are murdered in Gujarat', they declared. They resolved to rejuvenate these values in the Narmada valley with the slogan - 'Our Village - Our Rule''. Accordingly, no dam-related work, officials, surveyors, no such construction will be allowed in the valley. No census in the dam-affected villages and no land tax will be paid. Girishbhai Patel, their comrade from Gujarat declared that he will leave his thriving legal practice and will henceforth settle in the valley. Dr. Sharma assured them of helping them till the valley decides to fight out. Medha Patkar reiterated her plan to further consolidate the base in tribal area of Maharashtra as she will be making village Bamni as centre of her activities.

People in Narmada valley, with bruised sullenness seem to ask, 'We will see now how they will build the dam. We will see.' The storm is gathering. The petty politicians will have to pay the price of neglecting a democratic, non-violent people's movement. What they have done in all parts of India, they are doing in Narmada valley today. The valley is ready to take them on.

# Yatra revealed govt's true colours: Medha

The iron lady of Ferkuva — is how Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar has come to be known. Even after a 22-day-long fast at Ferkuva in protest against the proposed Sardar Sarovar Project and government repression, Patkar's determination to fight against other similar dams has only increased. She spoke to **Ranvir Nayar** on various aspects of the agitation

**JAN VIKAS YATRA:** The government's true colours were revealed during the agitation. The Gujarat government used its might against unarmed people while the Madhya Pradesh government remained indifferent to their sufferings.

We had decided not to resort to violence or confrontation with the people brought by the Gujarat government. We also wanted to look inwards and see if our people were ready for the final struggle which will begin now.

This yatra took the agitation into a different moral plane and indicated that the struggle was indefinite and a question of life and death for the tribals. I was fed up after six years of mobilisation at all levels and needed a stop to review my work.

Our avowed target was to stop the dam work at the site without resorting to violence. The original plan was to stage a peaceful satyagraha. We had to change the plan midway but that is normal as there is always space to be filled in depending upon the response of the government. We had discussed all probabilities, including being stopped at the border, and even the last resort to indefinite fast.

Although we may not have achieved the target we got more than expected in terms of the impact of the yatra — opening up the issue to a lot of people. It also convinced people that it was their movement.

The programme has also helped us expose the nature and spirit behind the pro-dam supporters. They admitted that they were not a united forum or an organisation. Gujarat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel's political intentions were also exposed in the tactics used by him.

For our supporters, the yatra has posed a big challenge. We must feel encouraged at the vast and varied response. The yatra did what 100 public meetings could not have achieved.

The most important gain was the feeling of self-reliance and confidence that it gave to the dam affected. We have to fight the government on all fronts if we truly claim to represent the people. We must stop weighing the agitation vis-a-vis government policy, politics, bureaucracy etc. We have liberated our supporters from these constraints and they will stop reviewing our strategy in relation to the advertisments of the government.

**LANDMARKS OF NARMADA STIR:** The yatra was a recharging experience. However, there have been many landmarks before this. We had already mobilised the tribals in Maharashtra whose complaints were placed before the highest authorities, including the World Bank.

Another landmark was May 15, 1988, when we had prepared our charter of demands and submitted it to all chief secretaries of three states and top level of the Narmada Control Authority.

April 16, 1987; when I moved to Madhya Pradesh was also important and it led to Nimar standing up against the dam. Harsud meet last year made Narmada an issue of opposition to present development model and proposed alternative models. It earned Narmada a place among leading movements in India, brought together tribals and human rights activists and made common goals between the two. It was also symbolic of coming together of various tribal organisations with focus on right to life, information and challenging the existing exploitation of the natural resources.

After Harsud, the stir picked up momentum. The WB had to produce piles of reports on SSP and their decision to threaten government with deadlines was unique. The independent review by Conable was also one.

**FUTURE STAREGY:** Self-rule, which has begun in the valley, is not an extreme step as taken by the Naxalites in other parts of the country. MP is a highly heterogenous society but has come a long way from 1987. People have been prepared to overcome social and community differences.

Now the focus will be on obstructing work related to the dam. Self sufficiency is very difficult today and only self reliance is possible. Use of natural resources, if agreed upon by villagers, can give us strength to talk with the outsiders.

We have to use tactics acceptable to all. But to draw a middle between the extreme tribals of Satpura and the urbanised people of Nimar.

**PRAGMATISM OF NBA:** The government can be compelled to stop their extravaganza to oppose the stir. I am not sure if Saurashtra will not rise against the project. The government cannot drown the truth in Narmada for ever. Its propagangda is so unrealisitc nowadays that it has started exposing it. Time is the only factor. We have a pragmatic approach, our strategies should work.

The challenge for us is to plan our mobilising and confrontation strategies. Only then can we change the end results of the agitation.

Pragmatism is not to be measured in terms of compromises on issues but on our ability to frame strategies to counter such situations. A government, indulging in a political stunt, cannot break away from the people's feelings.

But, we have to break the myth in Gujarat and also use external pressures as non-governmental organisations, eminent persons, media, WB, other governments, etc. This activity will increase in the next phase.

We will also have to generate a pressure group to match the one built by the government propaganda and counter the strategy of the vested interests. We also have to reach out to the common man and middle class.

Compare the situation in 1985, when I joined the movement. Till 1986, I had no confidence that we could raise so many basic issues on the dam. Even the WB is forced to respond to each and every statement of the NBA. If government is so confident then why does it spend crores of rupees to tackle our agitation.

**BABA AMTE'S ENTRY:** It has not weakened the organisation. When he wrote of his desire to come here it was a clear indication of his committment. There was no reason to fear the entry of any supporter because you feel he would take total charge of the movement and leave you behind. If someone is powerful enough to shoulder the entire movement, what's the harm?

There was an attempt by the government to break the movement by creating a rift between Amte and the organisation.

Independent. 8 Feb, 91

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN at Ferkuwa, M.P.-Gujarat border
10.2.1991

Villages in Narmada Valley Boycott Census as Part of Non-Cooperation.

Several villages in the Narmada valley boycotted the census as a part of the non-cooperation with the state. The decision was taken while returning from the thirty seven days old Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra by the villagers affected by the controversial Sardar Sarovar project. Boycotting the census is a part of the wider programme of non-cooperation and the 'our village-our rule'.

As the officials arrived in the villages for the census, on the first day the villagers refused to talk to them and peacefully told them to leave the village. They argued, "while the census is meant for planning and development, the state has the plans to destroy the Narmada Valley. Therefore, the census is meaningless." As the first reports reached Badwani, people boycotted the census in Anjad, Chhota Badada, Kundia, Kasaravad, Bhavanriya, Kadmal, Kavathi, Sondul, Palya, Avalda, Bhamta, Katora, Chikhalda and other villages in Madhya Pradesh. Total boycott was observed in the thirty three tribal villages in Maharashtra. The police tried to intimidate the people in Narmadanagar and Chikhlda though it is held that the census is to take place without any duress.

Baba Amte told the census officials, who went to register his name that "the Narmada valley peacefully but resolutely boycotts the census. Census operation is meant for planning for development and in the national interest. But the government is planning the destruction of Narmada Valley. For thirty seven days, we the people from Narmada valley were on the roadside for our rights. But no power-holder cared to treat us as the member of the nation."

Meanwhile, the villages in the Narmada Valley are handing over the resolutions about the decision of non-cooperation to any of the government acts regarding the Sardar Sarovar Project to the sub-divisional magistrate.

## A WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE

This week I would like to pay tribute to a remarkable woman. Medha Patkar.

Who wins or loses the battle over the Narmada dams is another matter. Neither truth nor justice has any role in such decisions. The compulsions of politics— and the lure of big money— has its own inevitable logic. And not even prime minister Chandra Shekhar can afford to ignore that, much as he knows how ill-conceived the project is and how dearly it will cost the nation eventually.

The battle is unequal.

On one hand, you have Chiman Patel's hired hordes demanding that work on the dams must carry on. On the other, you have the displaced tribals led by Baba Amte determined to fight till the bitter end, to stop what must be the biggest planned environmental disaster in the history of free India. At a cost that would make the nation bankrupt.

The credit for not allowing this project to easily go through must be given to the indefatigable Patkar, who has waged a bitter war against the desecration of the magnificent river. For months she has gone around, met the tribal leaders, brought them together: to create a fighting machine that could take on the might of the state and, of course, the World Bank which has now become a symbol of the first world's exploitation of poorer nations.

Even if this battle is lost, Medha's efforts would not be in vain. For she has proved that however tough the odds may be, and however venal the politicians, it is still possible for us to stand up for our rights and fight.

A setback here or a defeat there can no longer stop people from catching eco-criminals and lynching them, however rich or powerful they may be, however much support they may derive from a corrupt and heartless state machinery mortgaged to the interests of big business.

This is Medha's achievement.

– Pritish Nandi, in Illustrated Weekly of India, Jan 12-13, 91

# STOP
# THE NARMADA DAMS

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